

Critical Postmodern Social Work & Spirituality

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of
Master of Social Work

Melissa D'Amico

School of Social Science & Planning, RMIT University
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Declaration

I certify that except where due acknowledgement has been made, the work is that of the author alone; the work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award; the content of the thesis is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program; and, any editorial work, paid or unpaid, carried out by a third party is acknowledged.

Melissa D'Amico

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis explores the relationship between emancipatory politics and spirituality, and what this has to offer a critical postmodern approach to social work. At the centre of this exploration is a desire to open up a space for spirituality within critical postmodern approaches to social work. It is focused on forming a connection between critical postmodern social work theory and liberation spirituality. Liberation spirituality is a framework created by Joel Kovel and at the heart of his framework is a connection between emancipation and spirituality.

I outline my research approach in the first chapter. Chapter two explores the diversity and complexity of spiritual meanings, examines the influence of the western context on spirituality, analyses the relationship between language and spirituality, and outlines my assumptions in relation to spirituality. Chapter three examines the historical and social context influencing social workers' engagement with spiritual issues. It also explores the engagement of current social work literature with issues of spirituality.

Chapters four and five consider distinctions between critical social work conducted in the modernist tradition, and critical postmodern social work. This is done to establish why critical postmodern social work approaches are more suited to engage with spiritual issues. The conceptual connection between critical postmodern social work and liberation spirituality will be explored in chapter six and chapter seven. The latter in particular includes a detailed examination of the relationship between emancipatory politics and spirituality. The thesis concludes in chapter eight by analysing implications of this conceptual connection.

CHAPTER ONE – SPIRITUALITY & CRITICAL SOCIAL WORK: MY RESEARCH APPROACH

“Slaves and serfs discovered it according to the unfolding of the conditions of their domination. Luther discovered it, and Thomas Munzer, and countless religious radicals since; as did Blake, Tom Paine and the antireligious philosophies of the eighteenth century, and Marx and Engels of the century to follow. The abolitionists discovered it, and the suffragettes, along with Rosa Luxemburg, Emma Goldman, Gandhi, Cesar Augustso Sandino, Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, Frantz Fanon, Aime Cesaire, Ho Chi Minh, and Fidel Castro. And women and men in occupied territories all over the world discover it and rediscover it every day...the basic motion of human spirit” (Kovel, 1991, p.110)

This quote from Kovel suggests that the human spirit is something fundamental and continuous throughout human history. The human spirit is seen as woven through historical and present day accounts of oppressive and emancipatory relations. Concepts of the human spirit, soul and spirituality in relation to oppressive and emancipatory relations are also explored by other writers (e.g. Spretnak, 1982; Finley, 1991; Batstone, Mendieta, Lorentzen & Hopkins, 1997; Lerner, 2000), who have asked questions such as: ‘how do oppression and emancipation relate to spirituality?’ and ‘what is the relationship between spirituality and emancipatory politics?’. These inquiries intrigue me, and I am puzzled by their absence in social work literature, particularly in the literature on critical social work.

Critical social work theorists recognise that society oppresses certain people and creates injustices that effect people’s day to day lives. At the heart of critical social work theories and practices is a focus on emancipatory politics which seek to eradicate oppression and domination and create social transformation towards a more just society. While focusing on emancipatory politics critical social work theorists do not appear however, to engage significantly with the relationship between emancipatory politics and spirituality, as Kovel does in the above quote. I believe such an inquiry would add something important

to critical social work approaches, and would challenge, particularly critical postmodern social work, to be more holistic. Critical postmodern social work theorists claim to provide a more holistic understanding of emancipation going beyond a “modernist dichotomy” and allowing social workers to locate themselves “into a holistic contextual picture” (Fook & Pease, 1999, p.228-229). Yet, I believe the picture drawn by current critical postmodern theorists within social work does not fulfil this claim. A more holistic understanding of emancipation would include a consideration of spiritual issues.

Just as “emancipatory politics in critical theory has...been rethought by many critical theorists in the light of postmodernism” (Pease, Allan, & Briskman, 2003, p.3), I propose that emancipation should be rethought in the light of spiritual issues, particularly those issues raised by liberation spirituality. ‘Liberation spirituality’ is a framework created by Joel Kovel, which, encompasses the idea that spirituality is crucial to emancipatory politics and, as such, plays a vital part in creating a more emancipatory society (Kovel, 1991).

The intent of my research is to work towards a conceptual connection between critical postmodern social work theory and liberation spirituality. In this thesis I will consider the relationship between emancipatory politics and spirituality, particularly liberation spirituality, and explore what this has to offer conceptions of critical postmodern social work.

Emancipatory politics & spirituality

Emancipatory politics, or liberation politics, are political positions that seek emancipation for people who are oppressed and dominated in society. The term liberation has been used in many different ways throughout the course of human history. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the intellectual movement known as the Enlightenment saw liberation as the liberation of ‘men’ from irrational thought and superstition (Hopkins, 1997; Ferrer, 2002). Later on, Karl Marx viewed liberation as freeing people from the social and economic system of capitalism (Marx & Engels, 1967).

In contemporary society liberation and oppression are defined more broadly. Thompson (1998) provides a broader definition of oppression as:

“inhuman or degrading treatment of individuals or groups; hardship and injustice brought about by the dominance of one group over another; the negative and demeaning exercise of power. Oppression often involves disregarding the rights of an individual or group and is thus a denial of citizenship” (p. 10).

Oppression is particularly seen as occurring along the lines of “race, gender, class, sexual orientations, religion, age and dis/ability...” (Wong, 2004, p.2). Subsequently, liberation is envisioned through the radical change of political, social and economic structures, which are seen as creating and supporting oppression. The removal of political and legal institutions that restrict homosexual rights or that work against women’s rights would be examples of this. Liberation is also seen as psychological, with liberation from internalised oppression being another form of liberation. Internalised oppression is understood as “the incorporation and acceptance by individuals within an oppressed group of the prejudices against them within the dominant society” (Pheterson, 1986, p.148). So, “oppressed [people] become agents of their own oppression”, and “by internalising the opinion that the oppressors hold of them, they come to lack confidence in themselves and believe in the invulnerability and power of the oppressor” (Pease, 2003, p. 192-193). Liberation from internalised oppression would involve overcoming ideas and thoughts that accept oppression, and no longer seeing oneself as inferior.

For Joel Kovel (1991), oppression and liberation are more than just material and psychological, they are also spiritual. Kovel (1991) suggests that for liberation to occur the spiritual aspect of liberation and oppression must be considered. He discusses emancipatory politics, the project of seeking liberation, as a spiritual project. In my view, Joel Kovel’s work, encompassed in his *liberation spirituality* framework, can contribute significantly to social work theories and practices, particularly those from critical postmodern traditions. In chapter seven, the contribution of liberation spirituality to

critical postmodern social work theory will be examined, and Kovel's work will be discussed in more depth.

Purpose of this thesis

The purpose of this thesis is to connect conceptually Kovel's liberation spirituality, to critical postmodern social work theories. The intention is not to form a generalised or comprehensive approach to spiritual issues in social work, but rather, to open up spaces for spirituality in critical postmodern social work theories. The research will: 1) explore the connection between emancipatory politics and spirituality, 2) begin to address the lack of a conceptual engagement with issues of spirituality in theoretical writing on critical postmodern social work, and 3) contribute to the current body of knowledge in the field of critical social work.

Methodology

Method of locating & identifying the literature

My research began with a broad search for books, journal articles and websites pertaining to 'social work' and 'spirituality/religion'. I specifically used search engines such as Proquest to locate journal articles. I limited my research to western English speaking countries mainly Australia, United Kingdom and the United States for two reasons. Firstly, because this is where the majority of literature was to be found. However, I do realise in a global context there are multiple references to spirituality within non-western countries that are valuable. But, these countries may not have an established social work profession, so there was little literature connecting social work to spirituality within these non-western countries. Secondly, because 'spirituality' itself is an extremely broad topic and I wanted to limit the context within which I would explore this topic in order to have a more in-depth exploration. So I limited my focus to western countries.

Within western countries, particularly within the United States, I discovered a developing field of social work and spirituality. However, the topic of social work and spirituality was for the most part in the margins of mainstream journals and texts, and in general

mainstream literature was quite dismissive of this topic. This was in contrast to what I discovered when I ventured outside of the social work domain. I found there a rapidly developing interest in spirituality, in particular a whole field of ‘transpersonal’ psychology. Transpersonal psychology (as outlined on page 40) is focused on spiritual awareness and development, however, it lacks a social justice orientation. My interest in social justice based research caused my search terms to be further focused. I searched for the terms ‘social justice and spirituality’ and ‘emancipatory politics and spirituality’ within social work literature. This search revealed a notable gap in the literature. I then began to explore ‘critical social work theory’ and ‘critical postmodern social work theory’, given that these theories are centred on social justice and emancipation within social work. I noted that these theories contained little discussion of spirituality. I then began a broader literature review again using the key terms of ‘social justice and spirituality’ and ‘emancipatory politics and spirituality’ but not limiting the search to the arena of social work literature. This search brought my attention to the work of Joel Kovel, particularly to his concept of liberation spirituality.

I had no preconceived design for locating the literature in my research, rather the broad research revealed a significant gap, which lead to further exploration. While it is helpful this organic approach has its limitations. The main limitation is that there could have been literature that was omitted during the search, particularly literature that does not explicitly refer to spirituality but touches on spiritual issues. While the discovery of liberation spirituality and critical theories came from an organic method of research my decision to use these theories, as the basis of my research was a deliberate decision.

Analysis of the literature

Following the process of identifying and locating literature is the process of analysing literature. As different ways of analysing or approaching the literature will lead to different outcomes or a focus on different aspects, it is important to explicitly acknowledge this process.

Critical reflection is a tool at the centre of critical social work. It is a process or a way of opening up “marginalised aspects of experience to be incorporated into understandings of the world” (Fook, 1999, p.203)¹. Critical reflection is an essential part of my research because it allows for a critical analysis of the literature. It values the process by which knowledge is formed, it allows for reflection on this process, and it explores marginalised experiences and understandings (of which spirituality is one). Overall, critical reflection involves:

- Reflecting on and questioning “knowledge claims in an ongoing way” (Allan, 2003b, p.68).
- Being critical by “not taking existing social arrangements for granted” (Mullaly, 2002, p.175), striving “to unveil reality, unmask its mythicization” (Freire, 1972, p.92).
- Thinking “which perceives reality as a process, as transformation, rather than as a static entity” (Freire, 1972, p.81).
- Integrating “theory and practice through a process of ‘reflection-in-action’” (Allan, 2003b, p.68).

Critical reflection as a tool or process is mainly applied to the practice context, and involves analysis and theory being “woven with action” (Allan, 2003b, p.69). In this thesis my focus will be more on theory, critically reflecting on theory, but this is not to say that critical reflection cannot be as seen as a form of action in itself (Freire, 1972). Crotty (1998) for example, explores the idea that “critical reflection is already action” because the process of critical reflection involves developing a critical consciousness and consciousness is seen by some as “an active intervention into reality” (p. 151).

Critical reflection is useful as a central process in constructing a conceptual connection because it “unmasks complex political/ideological agendas hidden in our writing” (Richardson, 1994, p.523). So, the use of critical reflection will hopefully help to ensure that my political and ideological stance is made clear. Also the concept of critical

¹ In critical social work, critical reflection is sometimes referred to as “self-reflexivity”, “critical reflectivity” or “critically reflective practice” (Allan, 2003b, p.68).

reflection is held as important within critical social work, therefore as a methodology or a research process, it is congruent with the main theoretical perspectives being drawn on.

Another understanding that will inform this thesis is a dialectic perspective. A dialectical perspective contends that “apparently contradictory opposites” or differences between theories and perspectives can be held together (Ife, 1999, p.221). A dialectical perspective is one where, from “the tensions between these apparent contradictions...creative change can emerge” (Ife, 1999, p.221). So creativity is seen as potentially emerging from contradiction or tension. In attempting to create this framework there will be differences and contrasts between the approaches that will be used. Overall, the process of researching and writing within my work will be governed by critical reflection and influenced by a dialectical perspective.

The critical nature of this research

Critical forms of research (which are based on critical theory) encompass a “social or cultural criticism” (Crotty, 1998, p.157). Critical research questions the current social order and “current ideology...in the cause of social justice” (Crotty, 1998, p.157). The main concerns for critical researchers are “issues of power and oppression...expos[ing] the forces of hegemony and injustice” (Crotty, 1998, p.157).

Underlying a critical research inquiry is the assumption that “certain groups in any society are privileged over others, constituting an oppression that is most forceful when subordinates accept their social status as natural, necessary or inevitable” (Crotty, 1998, p.158). It is also assumed that there are many different forms of oppression and that “concern for only one form of oppression at the expense of others can be counterproductive because of the connections between them” (Crotty, 1998, p.158). Essential to critical research is the assumption that social transformation, with an emancipatory goal, needs to occur to challenge oppression.

My research is a critical inquiry and as such the assumptions embedded in this type of research are central in my inquiry. It is essential to be explicit about these assumptions as

they directly affect my interest in and focus on emancipation. Crotty considers critical research to be “a form of praxis – a search for knowledge, to be sure, but always emancipatory knowledge, knowledge in the context of action and the search for freedom” (Crotty, 1998, p.159). This research therefore seeks out emancipatory knowledge, a primary goal of most critical research.

Research limitations

In conducting any research there are limitations to be considered and acknowledged. In this research limitations are not seen as something to be resolved, but rather as boundaries and difficulties to be aware of. One evident limitation when seeking to explore a connection between theoretical perspectives is the sometimes self-contained world that many theories occupy. Scott (1990) articulates this difficulty in the following paragraph:

“Feminist, Marxist, liberals, and so on, construct different facts and have frequently been both unable and unwilling to establish conventions for translating statements from one framework into another. Indeed, it is sometimes argued that each theoretical position occupies a completely enclosed cultural world and that mutual intelligibility is impossible” (p.58).

While I do not believe that integrating theories is impossible, it is far from an easy task. The difficulty when attempting to integrate and connect theories or frameworks is that they all have their own focus, history of development, language and perceptions. So, trying to interpret the use of language and the understandings developed within varying theories can be difficult. However, whilst acknowledging the difficulties in trying to translate understandings across theoretical stances, similar uses of language and common understandings are also evident. One example is that both critical social work theories and liberation spirituality both use the concept of praxis.

Attempting to connect theories is sometimes limited by their sheer inaccessibility. Most theories are tailored to specific fields and as such use specialised knowledge. Consequently, the language often seems as though it is in code. An example of the inaccessibility of knowledge is seen in the following work discussing Freire's pedagogy of the oppressed (a critical theory):

"We wish to emphasize that Freire's work cannot be appropriated or appreciated if it is absorbed into hagiolatry or a celebratory apologetics or abstracted by liberals from its sociopolitical and geopolitical roots in their lapidary quest for a foundational method and universal epistemology" (McLaren & Tadeu da Silva, 1993, p.51).

The interesting and ironic point about this discussion of Freire is that in the next few paragraphs the authors acknowledge that "all language, according to Freire, works to reproduce dominant forms of power relationships..." as well as having the capacity to challenge these power relations (McLaren & Tadeu da Silva, 1993, p.53). It is quite common for critical theorists and postmodernists, as well as other theorists, to argue that language and knowledge contribute to reproducing dominant power relations, and then to go on and use specialised language and knowledge that is only accessible to the few. Language used to describe liberation and to critique oppression is often itself reproducing dominant forms of power relations by its inaccessibility. This is a common problem in writing that is difficult to overcome. One of my goals in this research is to make my writing as accessible as possible, to keep in mind that social work itself, particularly critical postmodern social work, comes with its own language barriers that can restrict people's access to this perspective.

Attempting to bring different theories and perspectives together in a meaningful way raises the problem of eclecticism. I believe there is insight to be gained by the complementary as well as the contrasting aspects of connecting different theories. However, gathering parts of theories and then linking them to aspects of other theories can lead to the essence of the works being negated. I will try to avoid this by gathering and using the primary ideas within critical postmodern social work theories and liberation

spirituality. For example, emancipatory politics will be central to my discussion of critical social work theory. Also, my analysis of liberation spirituality will draw on the two key points in Kovel's work, the marginalisation and alienation of spirituality, and the role of spirituality in social oppression and emancipation.

While, I believe a conceptual exploration is needed, another limitation of this research is the absence of a practical component. This can be a limitation because it can cause theory to be valued above practice, or it can result in theories and concepts that have little relevance to practice. For example theoretical categories such as 'spiritually orientated social work practitioners', 'social workers interested in spirituality', 'critical social work' and 'critical postmodern social work' can all set up categories and labels that practitioners may not identify with. In the course of writing this thesis I could possibly create a new category of 'critical spiritual social work', but that may not be useful to social work practitioners. While I believe that my thesis has implication for practice it is important to acknowledge the theoretical basis to my work and the limitations this brings.

A central difficulty within this work is the limited amount of space and time in which to explore the breadth and depth of spiritual issues, as well as liberation spirituality and critical postmodern social work. Exploring spiritual issues in this thesis is difficult because of the tension between acknowledging and wanting to work with spiritual diversity and needing a working definition of spirituality in order to explore spiritual issues conceptually. Canda & Furman (1999), two prominent social workers from the United States who engage with spiritual and social work issues, deal with this in their work by using a definition informed by a number of social workers. One identified weakness of this definition is that communities, families and clients we work with were excluded from the process of development. I believe however some exclusions are inevitable when choosing a particular understanding to work with. In this thesis my intention is to acknowledge that the definition of spirituality that I will be using is one of many definitions.

A further concern or limitation of this work is that the process of examining spiritual issues through a conceptual connection could lead to the problem of theorising spirituality. I will attempt to avoid this by exploring the relationship between spirituality and issues of emancipation, rather than theorising spirituality or constructing specialised spiritual knowledge. However, even the process of constructing arguments around spirituality and exploring spiritual issues has been critiqued. As Canda and Furman (1999) outline, some people contend that spiritual issues should not be explored because they are too private and sacred to express and discuss. Some have counter-argued that this claim is “a strategy to avoid critical scrutiny...” (Canda & Furman, 1999, p.41).

While, I believe spiritual issues should be discussed there is a need to acknowledge that spirituality can involve private and sacred aspects. This can restrict our ability to express spiritual meaning as we might not wish to make public something that is very private or very important to us. There can also be difficulty in ‘capturing’ spiritual issues in language. So, there are inherent and serious limitations in attempting to describe, explore and capture the depth of spiritual issues.

Ontology, epistemology & spirituality

Every piece of research carries within it “a certain way of understanding *what is* (ontology) as well as a certain way of understanding *what it means to know* (epistemology)” (Crotty, 1998, p.10). In research “ontological issues and epistemological issues tend to merge together” (Crotty, 1998, p.10). Understandings of what constitute reality (ontology) invariably affect what knowledge we consider to be real or valid (epistemology). Fook (2002) also addresses this connection stating, “‘knowing’ is an integral part of ‘being’” (p.33).

The two major ontological positions within social research are realism and idealism. Idealism is an ontological view that considers that “what is real is somehow confined to what is in the mind, that it consists only of ‘ideas’” (Crotty, 1998, p.64). This stance does not allow for a consideration of spirituality to be real or existing outside or beyond people. Realism on the other hand, is “an ontological notion asserting that realities exist

outside the mind” (Crotty, 1998, p.10). It accommodates an objectivist epistemology where knowledge is independent of the mind/people (Crotty, 1998), however, that is not congruent with an epistemology that considers spiritual knowledge to be valid, and both external to and influenced by reality.

Spiritual knowledge or ‘ways of knowing’ refers to or encompasses “a multidimensional access to reality that includes not only intellectual knowing of the mind, but also the emotional and emphatic knowing of the heart, the sensual and somatic knowing of the body, the visionary and intuitive knowing of the soul, as well as any other way of knowing available to human beings” (Ferrer, 2002, p.121). Current ontological positions, such as realism or idealism, do not have the capacity to accommodate spiritual knowledge. I believe this is because spiritual knowledge is seen as both real and simultaneously constructed, and also because the spiritual is itself an ontological position (my spiritual assumptions and understandings will be explored further in the following chapter). Kovel considers spirit itself to be an ontological position. He contends that “spirit is the possible, perhaps necessary ontological ground of emancipation...” (Kovel, 1988, p.303). Other writers have also referred to spirituality as an ontological ground of existence (Canda & Furman, 1999). Ontological is concerned with ‘being’ “with ‘what is’, with the nature of existence, with the structure of reality as such” (Crotty, 1998, p.10). Spirituality has been described as a ‘way of being’, concerned with the nature of existence and reality. Therefore, I believe that spirituality is itself an ontological position, and as such it cannot be labelled or placed within the current ontological categories.

The main epistemological positions are objectivism and constructivism. Both objectivist and constructivist epistemologies can be said to clash with spiritual ‘ways of knowing’ or knowledge. Constructivism claims that reality is socially constructed and as such “there is no objective truth waiting for us to discover”, that truth and “meaning is not discovered, but constructed” (Crotty, 1998, p.8-9). Subsequently, from a constructivist stance spiritual meaning and truth would be seen as socially, culturally and historically constructed, rather than ‘real’. Subjectivism is another epistemological stance, which also does not accommodate for the idea of spiritual knowledge or understanding. Subjectivists

contend that meaning and knowledge do not come from people's interaction and engagement with the world, but rather people impose meaning on the world or society (Crotty, 1998). Subjectivists hold the belief that "meaning does not come out of an interplay between subject and object but is imposed on the object by the subject" (Crotty, 1998, p.9). So, spirituality would be seen as something people impose on the world. This still does not allow spiritual knowledge to be seen as legitimate.

An objectivist perspective has a rationalist view of the world and assumes that there is an "objective reality' which exists independently of people and can be measured" (Alston & Bowles, 2003, p.10). This understanding is diametrically opposed to spiritual knowledge as it is inclined to exclude non-rational or non-scientific explanations of reality. However, at the same time there is a similar premise behind some spiritual understandings and objectivism. This is that there is a 'truth' outside of reality waiting to be discovered. But, this is where the similarities end because the ideas about what constitutes truth differ radically between objectivism and spiritual knowledge. The question then becomes what epistemology, what perspective on the "the nature of knowledge'" will include spiritual knowledge (Crotty, 1998, p.8)?

Kovel's definition of spirituality partly draws on somewhat of a constructivist perspective but includes a place for spiritual knowledge. He distinguishes spirit from spirituality and sees spirituality as the way we try to express and grasp spirit from within our social, historical and cultural context. As such our spirituality from his perspective is constructed. However, the component of spirit is viewed as separate from the world, as a 'truth' outside of society. This actually accounts for the idea of spiritual knowledge and knowing being a reality or having access to 'truths'. As Kovel's definition will be used in my research spiritual knowledge will be viewed as valid, as having a legitimate access to 'truths' or 'meaning'. However, my work, like Kovel's definition, will also appreciate the significant boundaries and influences on people's spirituality that social, historical and cultural contexts create. In the following chapter the term 'spirituality' and its meaning will be explored in more depth.

Research questions

The following questions are important to my research:

- What is the relationship between spirituality and social work? How is this reflected in social work literature and theory?
- How can critical postmodern social work theory open up a space for spirituality?
- How can Kovel's work on relating emancipatory politics and spirituality inform, open up and challenge critical postmodern social work to embrace understandings of spirituality?
- What are the implications of connecting conceptually liberation spirituality and critical postmodern social work theory?

Before these questions can be examined, particularly before considering the relationship between social work and spirituality, a detailed exploration of spirituality and its use in this thesis needs to occur. This exploration will be conducted in the following chapter.

CHAPTER TWO – EXPLORING SPIRITUALITY

In this chapter the diverse meanings of spirituality and the relationship between spirituality and religion will be explored. The influence of the current western context on spirituality and an examination of the relationship between language and spirituality will follow. I then conclude with a summary of my understandings and assumptions concerning spirituality.

Spiritual Diversity

The human spirit, soul and spirituality are complex concepts that are contested and difficult to grasp. Spirituality, in particular, is a concept that comes with an array of meanings that are neither tangible nor patent. The meanings attached to the term spirituality can vary to a significant degree, as the following eight examples attest:

Spirituality “1. of the human spirit or soul, not physical or worldly. 2. of the Church or religion” (Oxford University, 1986, p.628)

Spirituality is “a lived experience, a set of practices and a consciousness that aligns us with a sense of the sanctity of All Being[s]” (Lerner, 2000, p.5)

“Spirituality...is an internal phenomenon addressing such issues as the search for a sense of meaning and purpose in one’s life, one’s beliefs about the functioning of the universe, and a personal moral code...It also involves a transcendent dimension and a desire to be connected to something greater than oneself. Spirituality may be but is not necessarily associated with organized religion...In sum, spirituality is often seen as human need to create order, connectedness, and meaning in chaotic existence...” (Cascio, 1998, p.525)

Spirituality is a “fundamental vital source and point of reference for our mind, will and heart, a basic orientation or conscious direction of human activity and inquiry. Spirituality is the pursuit of meaning...and sense of vital connection to one’s ultimate

environment – the dimension of depth in all life's endeavours and institutions” (Lugo, 1994, p.252)

Spirituality is understood as “the experiences of wholeness and integration, irrespective of religious beliefs or affiliation...an atheist can have a profound spiritual life” (Cowley, 1993, p.528)

Spirituality is both “spirituality-as-essence of human nature and spirituality-as-one-dimension, where essence refers to spirituality as the wholeness of humanity, and one dimension regards spirituality as a component of one's experiences” (Rice, 2002, p.306)

Spirituality “in its widest sense includes the whole of a person's or group's spiritual experience or orientation. This may involve beliefs, ways of thinking, feelings and relationships. Because it is all-embracing and encompasses all aspects of living, spirituality may include both behaviour and the attitudes that underlie it” (Lindsay, 2002, p.26)

Spirituality is something, which “permeates all human activities and experiences rather than being additional to them. Spirituality can be described as a process of transformation and growth, an organic and dynamic part of human development, of both individual and society” (King, 1989, p.5)

These are just some representations, which illustrate the diversity, complexity and contradictions within spiritual understandings. Spirituality can be viewed and represented as a function, a drive, an experience, a process, a dimension, a developmental level, a universal aspect of human nature, a moral code, a state of 'being' and state of consciousness, and in some cases, all of the above. People may also view spirituality as inwardly focused, and/or outwardly focused and concerned with people's connection to each other, the 'universe' and the environment. It can be seen as transcending the material world and/or being grounded in it. Spirituality for some may also involve a relationship with the 'divine' or a deity, or it may occur within atheistic understandings.

These meanings of spirituality also begin to give an insight into the significance of spirituality for some people. Spiritual can mean different things to different people. For Waldegrave, Tamasese, Tuhaka and Campbell (2003) spiritual meaning is partially found in the relationship between people, with spirituality used to guide a relationship based on dignity and integrity. Lerner (2000) finds spiritual significance in “moments of being overwhelmed, having one’s breath taken away, being captivated and excited by the marvel of all that is” (p.167). Estes (1992) describes spirituality as forming meaning “through music which vibrates the sternum, excites the heart; it comes through the drum, the whistle, the call and the cry. It comes through the written and the spoken word; sometimes a word, a sentence or a poem or a story” (p. 7). Martin and Martin (2002) construct spiritual meaning through lived experiences of hardship and pain, particularly outlining the power and meaning of spirituality during black slavery in America:

“Spirituality gave Black people the strength to go on when there were threats to their very existence, it gave them self-worth and dignity when oppressive forces were seeking to strip them of their humanity, hope when there seemed to be none, a way when there was no way, and even joy when confronted by nothing but a daily rhythm of hardship, frustration, and pain....spirituality gave Black people both courage and encouragement, and even in the midst of suffering and death, it gave them a will to live and the determination to make life worth living” (p.1).

It is clear that spirituality is significantly profound for some people. It can be associated with the way people choose to live their lives, and with the very terms of their existence. However, other people may view spirituality as irrelevant, and relate it to terms such as escapism or irrationality (Lerner, 2000). This view of spirituality is not uncommon, and can be influenced by people’s understanding of religion and by the western context. The following sections explore religion and the western context, and how they influence people’s understanding of spirituality.

Exploring religion

The above exploration of spirituality may touch on ideas and values that people hold but which they themselves do not associate with spirituality. One reason for people's reluctance to call their understandings 'spiritual' is that the terms religion and spirituality are often used interchangeably, and religion has negative connotations for them. Religious power and knowledge can be used for both "good and ill" (Anderson & Braud, 1998, p.246). It can be used conservatively to support power inequalities and injustice, as well as to challenge inequality. For example some Muslim women in universities in Cairo have used the Koran to challenge the lack of women's rights in the Middle East ('Unveiling Islam', 2003). At the same time, some religious leaders of the Muslim faith use the Koran, and its religious doctrine, to justify a lack of women's rights in the Middle East. More often than not religion has been criticised for being conservative or reactive (Lerner, 2000).

Religion has been criticised as being far too structured a site for spirituality to be expressed (Lerner, 2000), and some people hold the belief that religion can, and in some cases does, occur without a spiritual dimension (Lerner, 2000). In contrast, others hold the view that religion is the main manifestation of spirituality, therefore religion is always to some degree spiritual (Kovel, 1991). The meanings people attach to religion and the degrees of disparity between understandings of religion and spirituality are diverse and contested. Henery (2003) suggests that spirituality, like religion, can also be used conservatively or progressively. Furthermore, Henery (2003) contends that a binary division between spirituality and religion, with the assumption that religion is the conservative one of the two, can lead to the discrimination of people who are religiously affiliated.

Another disparity between religion and spirituality is that religion tends to be a more concrete and tangible concept than spirituality. Coholic (2001) defines religion as "a construction of institutionalized worship that is dependent on a notion of God and that is based on doctrine or a system of organized beliefs and behaviours, usually shared by people" (Coholic, 2001, p.xix-xx). Other writers (Cascio, 1998; Lerner, 2000) reflect

similar ideas, however these definitions of religion are open to interpretation and variation. For example, the term 'God' may be replaced with 'Goddess', or notions of deities may be replaced with ideas of 'Enlightenment' depending on people's religious preferences.

In this thesis religion is distinguished from spirituality by the following characteristics: 1) it is institutionalised or structured, 2) it involves a system of beliefs which are generally expressed externally, 3) the system of beliefs are shared by a group of people or a community (Cascio, 1998). Given these relatively fixed characteristics, I believe that understandings of spirituality and religion are distinguishable, but the degree to which they can be separated, their use and relationship to one other is complex and contested.

Spirituality in a Western context

Spirituality is marginalised in Western society. Belief in spirituality and religion appear to have decreased² particularly in the change from traditional to contemporary society (Kovel, 1991), yet a significant number of people do still hold religious and spiritual beliefs (Tacey, 2000; Lindsay, 2002)³. Therefore what do I mean by spirituality being marginalised in Western society? Joel Kovel (1991) uses the concept of de-spiritualisation to refer to this marginalisation in contemporary society. De-spiritualisation as he sees it, is "the pressure or tendency in social institutions to devalue the spiritual dimension, render it irrational, or even suppress its expression altogether" (Kovel, 1991, p.6). The marginalisation of spirituality or de-spiritualisation means that although spirituality is still important for many at a personal level it is devalued in the political or economic world⁴. Although, in Western society, "spirituality no longer

² For example, in Australia from 1971 to 2001 there was a 16% increase in the number of people stating that they have no religious affiliation (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2005).

³ In regards to religion the 2001 census revealed that 27% of Australians said they were Catholic, 21% said they were Anglican, 21% said they were from other Christian denominations and 5% were from non-Christian religions (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2005). All together 74% of people indicated a religious affiliation, and the census did not account for spiritual beliefs outside of a religious context (Australian Bureau Statistics, 2005).

⁴ While spirituality being marginalised from the political and economic sphere is discussed, it is acknowledge that there is to a certain extent an inclusion of religious moral beliefs within the political sphere. For example, some debates around abortion being embedded in religions beliefs and entering into

matters to the power structure[s], it still matters greatly to individuals” (Kovel, 1991, p.11). Lerner (2000) discusses an idea similar to de-spiritualisation, which he calls spiritual impoverishment. He writes that Western societies in particular, are poor spiritually because people’s spiritual needs are not being met, and that spiritual meaning and needs are devalued. Spiritual consciousness is therefore marginalized (Lerner, 2000).

Mitchell (1994) argues that four factors have cast spirituality into the margins: individualism, dualism, secularisation, and scientism. Individualism is a principle guiding modern society which holds “self-interest as a basis for the economic [and social] dimension[s] of life” (Mitchell, 1994, p.131-132). Mitchell (1994) claims that this has led to a loss of community and a focus on individual material gain, minimising interest in spirituality, particularly communal spirituality or spiritual beliefs that reach beyond the individual. Dualism, the formation of binary opposite categories for people or things, is embedded in Western, scientific, logical and linear ways of thinking. Dualism is said to cause “the dualism between self and other and self and nature, the...dualism between self and God” (Mitchell, 1994, p.134). Dualism is thought to cause the separation of the material from the spiritual, or the split of social-political and worldly factors from the spiritual. In contrast authors such as Tassi (1994) call for a spirituality “which does not reject material reality”, believing that “the human soul has not been fashioned independently of the body...we must not conceive of ourselves as being engaged in activities which seek to leave the body behind” (p.26). While not attributing spiritual marginalisation solely to modernity or dualism, Kovel (1991) does conclude that the “splitting [of] flesh and matter” or the “separation of body and soul” within dualism has contributed to despiritualization (p.34).

Mitchell (1994) also sees the occurrence of secularisation as contributing to a loss of spirituality. Secularisation relates to dualism in that it divides and places in binary categories church and state (Mitchell, 1994). Mitchell (1994) argues that under

political discussions. However, as indicated earlier there is a distinction between religion and spirituality, and the focus here is on spirituality being marginalised within the economic and political spheres, not necessary religion.

secularisation “God and religion have become more and more irrelevant” (p.132). Astell (1994) concurs, stating that “the separation of Church and State has increasingly marginalized the churches from mainstream life, making religious beliefs and practices of individuals an optional extra, an unnecessary and perhaps irrelevant supplement to their function in society” (Astell, 1994, p.4).

The development of science has, in Mitchell’s (1994) view, also contributed to the devaluing of spirituality. Most authors writing within this subject emphasise that science and spirituality need not be in oppositional categories that cannot co-exist or interrelate (Kovel, 1991; Lerner, 2000; ‘Testing God: Part Two’, 2004). They distinguish between forms of science that exclude all other possibilities, and those which do not, for example postmodern science (Kovel, 1991; Lerner, 2000; ‘Testing God: Part Two’, 2004). Kovel (1991) argues that science itself cannot be an “antithesis to spirituality”, and that while some forms of science do take an anti-spiritual stance this “leads us to criticize these kinds of science rather than oppose science to spirituality” (p.9). Lerner (2000) calls on spiritual seekers not to disregard science, and distinguishes science from scientism. Lerner (2000) states “*science* is a form of knowledge, a way of approaching reality. But *scientism* is an ideology that claims there is only one way to approach reality – through the empirical method based on a narrow notion of what kind of experience is legitimate” (p.66). He argues “scientism itself is another faith” while “science has a very powerful and important role to play in human affairs” (Lerner, 2000, p.64 & 65).

Mitchell (1994) holds a different perspective, that science as well as scientism has replaced and damaged spirituality and religion. This argument is highlighted in the following paragraph:

“Science rather than God is the object of modern faith. It is science, not God, that will meet our secular materialistic and consumeristic needs in this world. Science, not revelation, will give modern people what they need to know to have a materially better life. The natural sciences as well as the psychological, social, political and economic sciences are

‘believed’ to be able eventually to solve all our problems. This is the modern ‘myth of progress’...Scientism also gives modernity a widely accepted reason for rejecting religion. Science has been very successful through the practical application of an empiricist epistemology...[with] claims that this method of the modern natural sciences is the only method for ascertaining truth. Theology cannot produce cognitive assertions that can be verified empirically” (Mitchell, 1994, p.133).

Spirituality, like religion, can be described as ‘soft’ or ‘flaky’ because it is associated with feelings and beliefs and other factors that cannot be empirically verified. As such it can be pushed to the margins of a “rational secular world view [which] devalues mystery, spirituality, religious values and beliefs, emotion, and anything else that cannot be measured or counted” (Ife, 1997, p.30).

Individualism, dualism, secularisation and anti-spiritual sciences occur under modernity, and have lead to the argument that it is modernity itself that has played a significant role in the de-valuing of spirituality and spiritual ways of knowing. The term modernity, or the modern era, is said to describe a break away from the ‘pre-modern’ period in western history during which “traditional forms of authority associated with religion and feudalism” were paramount (Pease, Allan, Briskman, 2003, p.3). Modernity is characterised by a growth of industry, labour markets, new technologies and the replacement of church domination with science and reason (Bessant & Watts, 1999). However, modernity does not just describe a change in the face of society, it also describes a fundamental shift in paradigms (people’s worldviews). It is this shift in people’s worldviews from magic to science, from religion to secularisation, from community to individual that is said to cause de-spiritualisation. I believe modernity and some features of modernity, for example secularisation, have contributed to de-spiritualisation, however, modernity isn’t the only cause. Contemporary society is “occupied by Western modernism and postmodernism” and is still experiencing de-spiritualisation (Kovel, 1991, p.18).

Although people often refer to a 'postmodern era', in fact modernist thought and structures are still very present in today's society. The "basic institutions and structures of society" are still shaped by modernity and as such "postmodernity has not (yet) superseded modernity" (Pease, Allan & Briskman, 2003, p.9-10). However, this is not to say that postmodernism has not had a significant impact on society both as a body of thought and as a "cultural phenomenon" (Pease, Allan & Briskman, 2003, p.4). As a cultural and social phenomenon postmodernism is described as being "characterised by fragmentation brought about by an explosion of information and new technologies, consumer capitalism with its proliferation of products and images, political shifts and upheavals, and new experiences of space and time" (Pease, Allan, & Briskman, 2003, p.4).

Writers, such as Cowley (1993), believe that the "spiritual barrenness" of contemporary society is a result of a "postmodern malady" (p.528). Cowley argues that the "personal and societal challenges of the postmodern era" have led to spiritual meanings being lost, and peoples spiritual needs going unfulfilled (1993, p.528). Particularly, it has been argued that the fragmentation of postmodern times has damaged and marginalised people's spirituality, particularly in relation to communal spirituality. At the same time, some writers argue that postmodernism can in fact challenge spiritual marginalisation by countering modernity (Astell, 1994; Mitchell, 1994).

Capitalism is another important factor said to cause de-spiritualisation in western society. Capitalism is itself a complex and contested concept. Bessant and Watts (1999) offer the following summary:

"Capitalism is a social and economic system based on the possession by capital owners of the dominant means of productive property. Historically, capitalism arose when activities and relationships were changed into commodities. A commodity can include goods (e.g. pots and pans), services (e.g. child care) or activities (e.g. working). These commodities can be bought and sold on the market. The value of a

commodity is determined by the market and the demand and supply of those goods and services. Buying and selling labour for wages is a key defining feature of a capitalist economy. Essential to the rise of a capitalist economy is the existence of a class of labourers who have no other way of living except to sell their labour. A capitalist economy similarly relies on a class being able and willing to employ labourers. Inequality in economic wealth and power is a precondition without which a capitalist economy cannot develop or survive” (p.13).

Both Lerner and Kovel identify capitalism as a significant political socio-economic factor causing spiritual marginalisation. Lerner writes:

“Marxists used to say that the fundamental contradiction of capitalism is its inability to provide for the material needs of the working class. From my standpoint, however, the critical contradiction is not the economic but rather the spiritual and ethical impoverishment caused by the prevailing organization of society” (Lerner, 1997, p. 38).

Under capitalism spirituality is pushed from the broader economic and political sphere into the margins. The main domain of spirituality within capitalist societies is principally at the individual level (Lerner, 1997). New Ageism is a good example of the individually focused spirituality that is produced under capitalism⁵. As Kovel (1991) observes, New Age spirituality “does not enter the body of society at all...society is regarded as an abstract Other which intrudes upon the integrity of the self” (p.208). The focus within New Ageism is on self-fulfilment, self-realisation, and self-integration, so it fits well with the individualistic ethos of capitalism.

⁵ New Ageism or the New Age Movement describes a broad movement in western culture characterised by an eclectic approach to spiritual exploration (McLaughlin & Davidson, 1994; Sutcliffe & Bowman, 2000). The name New Age originated in the 1960's out of a belief that a spiritual age was coming that would transform individuals and society (McLaughlin & Davidson, 1994; Sutcliffe & Bowman, 2000). It was not until the 1980's that New Ageism or the New Age Movement was popularised in western culture (McLaughlin & Davidson, 1994; Sutcliffe & Bowman, 2000).

Overall, there appears to be many contextual factors affecting people's engagement with spirituality in western society. Factors such as secularisation, anti-spiritual science, and capitalism, are influencing what meaning and significance people attach to their spirituality. No one factor alone, modernism or postmodernism, is causing spiritual marginalisation, they are all playing a part, and the importance of all of these factors should be understood.

Spirituality and religion: Language

Attempts to explain, define and discuss spirituality within research are made additionally difficult by the relationship between language and spirituality. Most authors and academics agree that people's ability to conceptualise and describe spirituality is limited by language (Kovel 1991; Canda & Furman, 1999; Coholic, 2001; Lindsay 2002). There are however differing explanations as to why spirituality is difficult to describe within language.

Some writers believe "our rational minds and positivist scientific processes interfere with our ability to write and speak about these experiences", that our ideas of what constitutes evidence and rationality limit our ability to express spirituality (Coholic, 2001, p.xviii). Others simply state that spiritual experiences are "so private and profound that they cannot be communicated to another" (Canda & Furman, 1999, p.40). Another explanation of the somewhat difficult relationship between language and spirituality is the belief that "words cannot entirely capture some experiences [fully]" (Coholic, 2001, p.xviii). Spirituality expressed through language can fail to capture the whole or full experience of spirituality and can reduce spirituality to its parts, dissecting it, thereby losing its full meaning (Lerner, 2000). It is contended that this can occur because spirituality is "beyond the limits of language and reason to express" (Canda & Furman, 1999, p.40). Starhawk (1982) in the following paragraph discusses the use of symbols and spiritual acts as an alternative to using language to express and understand spirituality:

“The mysteries of the absolute can never be explained – only felt or intuited. Symbols and ritual acts are used to trigger altered states of awareness, in which insights that go beyond words are revealed. When we speak of ‘the secrets that cannot be told’, we do not mean merely that rules prevent us from speaking freely. We mean that the inner knowledge literally cannot be expressed in words” (p.49).

Kovel believes that the limitations of language to capture spirituality fully is “a reminder of the prison house which is language, whose words draw down, delimit, and necessarily narrow the possibilities of being” (Kovel, 1991, p.175). So, there can be no “formulaic answer as to what constitutes its fullness” nor how to best express spirituality in language (Kovel, 1991, p.182). Both the difficulty people have in finding words to express and understand spirituality, and the diversity of spiritualities, are consistent with Kovel’s assumption that there is no one answer to the questions of ‘what is spirituality?’ and ‘how do we adequately express and understand it?’. My intention for this discussion is to acknowledge the complexity of spirituality and its resistance to language, and to work with these limitations.

My spiritual understandings & the conceptualisation of spirituality I will be using

Whether or not it is acknowledged explicitly, all research in the area of spirituality carries preconceived notions of spirituality and religion. Therefore it is important for me to identify understandings I bring to my research, my assumptions regarding spirituality and ways of conceptualising spirituality. While I do not hold any particular religious beliefs, I do have my own understandings and assumptions in relation to spirituality that do not fall into a particular spiritual group or category. My assumptions regarding spirituality are as follows:

- Spirituality is an essential and relevant part of human existence.
- Spirituality is not restricted to the otherworldly, that it has a significant place in the material world.

- There are social implications of spirituality, and social influences on people's spiritual perspectives.
- Spirituality is marginalized and devalued in western society.
- Spiritual diversity and similarities should be valued by individuals and society at large.

I will be drawing on Kovel's conceptualisation of spirituality in my work. His understanding of spirituality, spirit and soul include:

- Spirit as the "relation between the person and the universe" (Kovel, 1991, p.33).
- Soul as the "spiritual form taken by the self" (Kovel, 1991, p.33).
- Spirituality as "the way people seek to realize spirit and soul in their lives" (Kovel, 1991, p.1-2). There is "no prescribed spirituality, we are saying that spiritual is a continual process of discovery and struggle, enacted in this world, which is to say, in history..." (Kovel, 1991, p.83).

Drawing on Kovel's conceptualisation in this thesis, spirituality is understood to be relevant both within and outside a religious context. Spirit is viewed as broad and encompassing, for example, spirit is the overall relationship between the person and the universe, and spirituality is more specifically the way we seek to realise, understand and practice spirit.

Kovel believes that there is "no prescribed spirituality...spirituality is a continual process of discovery and struggle, enacted in this world, which is to say, in history..." (Kovel, 1991, p.83). The way we seek to realise spirit, through spirituality, is coloured by a lens of history, culture, society, and power relations. As a result, no particular person can stand outside of their time and society and have access to an 'ultimate reality' or 'truth'. This is not to suppress or deny understandings of the spiritual as real but to say that when we seek to access and represent this spirit, 'truth', or meaning, we are located in this world. For example, as Kovel (1991) clearly states "spirit breaks loose from the given world; but all religions [and spiritualities] have to live in the world..." (p.4). Therefore,

for me, understandings of spirit and what it means to be spiritual are tied to this world, and tied to history, social relations, and to power and politics.

Conclusion

Spirituality is a complex concept with a number of definitions and understandings attached to it. Spirituality can play an extremely significant role in people's lives, but can have a negative meaning for others. The relationship between religion and spirituality often influences the meanings that people attach to spirituality. While the exact relationship between spirituality and religion is contested, they can be distinguished from each other. Spirituality is economically and politically marginalised in western society, and a number of factors contribute to this. Factors such as secularisation, anti-spiritual science, and capitalism are influencing what meaning and significance people attach to their spirituality.

An important consideration when working with spiritual issues is the limitation of language. Spirituality appears to defy language making it difficult to fully express spiritual understandings in words, as such these limitations should be acknowledge and worked with when exploring spiritual issues. Kovel's definitions of spirituality, soul and spirit will be used through this research, creating an emphasis on the social and power relations at play within spirituality.

CHAPTER THREE – SOCIAL WORK & SPIRITUALITY

As spirituality is marginalised within Western society, so it is marginalised within Western social work. However, over recent years there has been an increasing interest in spirituality and social work. This interest, and the debates and issues arising from the literature are examined in this chapter after establishing the historical and contemporary factors influencing the relationship between spirituality, religion and social work. The chapter concludes with a summary of gaps and underdeveloped issues and a discussion of current theories and models used in the field of social work and spirituality.

Social work, spirituality & religion: Historical & contemporary influences

A number of historical and contemporary factors influence the relationship between spirituality, religion and the social work profession. One factor is the historical connection between religion and social work (Canda & Furman, 1999; Lindsay, 2002). The origins of social work can be located in nineteenth century Britain, with the establishment of the Charity Organization Society (COS) formed in 1869 (Lindsay, 2002; Martin, 2003). This organization was also founded in Australia in 1887 and in both Australia and Britain it reflected religious values and concepts of charity (Lindsay, 2002). Its main aim was to distribute funds and services to people in poverty in order to reduce poverty (Martin, 2003; Lindsay, 2002). In distributing these funds and services this organization distinguished between people 'worthy' and 'unworthy' of charity, "the so-called 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor" (Martin, 2003, p.17-18). Overall, at this time philanthropic organisations focused on the individual, rather than examining the broader social context, and adopted a paternalistic approach to working with people in poverty (Cnaan, Wineburg, & Boddie, 1999). Religious roots of social work which involved making moralistic judgements of those in poverty, contribute to contemporary social workers, on the whole, dismissing or ignoring issues of religion and spirituality in social work because of their apprehension about repeating the past (Canda & Furman, 1999).

A second factor said to contribute to this uneasy relationship is the dominance in twentieth century social work of a 'scientific' approach (Lindsay, 2002). This scientific

approach to social work is illustrated in Mary Richmond's book entitled *Social Diagnosis*, which was based on a scientific problem solving approach (Richmond, 1917). The adoption of a scientific approach led to a more professional status for social work, and the emphasis on a rational and secular perspective (Kirk & Reid, 2002; Jenson, 2005). So, it is contended that some social workers nowadays have been reluctant to incorporate issues of spirituality and religion in social work practice and education because these issues appear to lack the professional status and academic credibility of the more 'rational', scientific based social work perspectives (Canda & Furman, 1999; Cnaan, Wineburg, & Boddie, 1999). This continuing emphasis on the professional nature of social work may also lead to negative views of religion and spirituality (Canda & Furman, 1999; Cnaan, Wineburg, & Boddie, 1999). As Canda and Furman (1999) articulate, "social workers who become involved with spiritual matters in practice may be perceived as incompetent or unscientific by other professionals, thus undermining the status of the profession" (p.68).

A third factor said to affect the relationship between religion, spirituality and social work is the influence of Sigmund Freud (Yelloly, 1980). In the 1920's and 1930's the mainstream social work profession adopted psychoanalysis (founded by Freud) as a basis of practice (Yelloly, 1980). Psychoanalysis profoundly influenced social workers' approach at that time, causing social workers to examine and focus on people's behaviours and specifically the "unconscious psychological determinants of behaviour" (Yelloly, 1980, p. 121-122). This diverted away from social factors, and created an emphasis on psychological processes, personality development and pathology (Yelloly, 1980). In particular, Freud's psychoanalytical work contained a negative portrayal of religion. Freud explicitly stated in relation to religious doctrine that "no one can be compelled to think them true, to believe in them. Some of them are so improbable, so incompatible with everything we have laboriously discovered about the reality of the world, that we may compare them...to delusions" (Freud, 1961, p.31).

Religion, according to Freud, is a "mass delusion" and a "universal obsessional neurosis of humanity" (Freud, 1961, p. 85 & p. 43). Freud reached this conclusion by drawing a

parallel between “religious worshippers and the obsessional neurotic [who both] spend hours in carrying out certain rituals, and in each case the omission of these acts excites feelings of acute apprehension” (Palmer, 1997, p.12). He also believed neurosis was a result of repression and that religion repressed people’s sexual impulses and instincts (Palmer, 1997). He argued that “like the obsessional neurosis of children, it [religion] arose from the Oedipus complex, out of the relation to the father” (Freud, 1961, p.43). The importance of Freudian thinking in social work in the 1920’s and 1930’s could have contributed to spirituality being viewed as a “narcotic, and a psychic disturbance” (Martin & Martin, 2002, p.5). Freud’s pathologising of religion alongside his influence on social work has undoubtedly been one of the factors shaping the relationship between social work, religion and spirituality.

The fourth factor influencing social workers’ relationship to religion is the work of Karl Marx. Karl Marx is another prominent theorist whose work has influenced the social work profession (Corrigan & Leonard, 1978). In the 1960’s and 1970’s Marx’s theory of capitalism lead social workers to adopt a critique of class and an analysis of the social structures impacting on the lives of clients (Corrigan & Leonard, 1978). Marx, like Freud, offered a negative depiction of religion, with the belief that behind religion “lurk[s] in ambush...bourgeois interests” (Marx & Engels, 1967, p.92). Specifically Marx critiqued the “the social principles of Christianity [which] declare all vile acts of the oppressors against the oppressed to be either the just punishment of original sins and other sins or trials that the Lord in his infinite wisdom imposes on those redeemed” (Marx, 1972b, p.74). Marx claimed that religion was “the *opium* of the people”, an anaesthetic used to escape the reality of class oppression (Marx, 1972a, p.38; Kovel, 1991). Marx therefore argued “the abolition of religion as the *illusory* happiness of the people is required for their *real* happiness” (Marx, 1972a, p. 38). Marx also described the “struggle against religion” as the “fight against *the other* world...” (Marx, 1972a, p.37). Marx represents religion as something that people used to escape from reality, which is removed from the ‘real’ world (Kovel, 1991). Also, a Marxist analysis, which places the emphasis on economic determinism and materialism (Healy, 2000) tends to delegitimise and invalidate spiritual knowledge by excluding and dividing spiritual and

religious issues from material and economic issues. So, both Marx's opinion of religion and a Marxist analysis can be seen to contribute to the ambivalent relationship between religion, spirituality and social work.

The current social context is another factor shaping the relationship between religion, spirituality and social work. As I have noted in chapter two, religion and spirituality, on the whole, are marginalised within western secular society, and social workers are likely to have a reduced engagement with these issues. This is particularly evident when compared with non-western (for example African centred) social work which focuses a great deal more on spiritual and religious issues (Martin & Martin, 2002). However, the differences are not just between western and non-western contexts but also between western nations themselves. For example, social workers from Australia and the United States vary in their degree of interest in spiritual and religious issues. Tacey (2000), an Australian academic and author on spirituality within Australia, states "in Australia you can have as many religious feelings as you like as long as you do not talk about them in religious terms or name them as 'religious'" (p.44). He suggests that in the Australian context spirituality and religion are not as openly discussed as in the United States. So the differences in people's attitude from context to context influence engagement with issues of spirituality and religion (Lindsay, 2002).

This complex and rather tense, uncomfortable and reluctant relationship between social work, spirituality and religion is influenced by contemporary and historical factors as we have seen.

Social work & spirituality: Overview

Within the last ten years in American social work there has been a growing interest in spirituality which has led to the development of a significant body of research (Canda, 2003). Canda (2003), an author from the United States with more than eighty publications on spirituality and religion in social work, confirms that "there is no longer any reason for newly published articles to begin with such statements as: 'the topics of spirituality and religion have rarely been addressed in social work'" (p.80). This

increased interest in the United States is evident in the establishment of the Society for Spirituality and Diversity in Social Work in 1990 and in the growing number of books, social work courses, articles and conference papers addressing these issues (Pellebon, Anderson & Angell, 1999; Rice, 2002; Canda, 2003). The topic of spirituality, as well as religion, is increasingly being drawn into mainstream social work in the United States, with at “least 50 schools” of social work in America offering subjects on spirituality in 2002, up from 17 in 1995 (Rice, 2002, p.304). However, although we can note a developing interest in spirituality and religion within social work practice and education, in the United States this topic on the whole, really still remains in the margins.

In Australia, research and publication on the topic of spirituality and social work is very undeveloped (Rice, 2002, p.305). While there has been some unpublished post-graduate research (e.g. Craven, 1997; Melendez, 2003) and some published articles (e.g. Cox, 1985; Edwards, 2002; Rice, 2002; Coholic, 2003), overall there has been little research, writing or debate. However, this is not to say that there has been no interest in this topic. Lindsay (2002), the author of one of the few Australian books explicitly addressing spirituality and social work, highlights the formation of social work interest groups on the topic of spirituality as an indicator of such interest. In Western Australia, an Australian Christian Social Worker group was established in 1997, and an “informal support group for Buddhist Social Workers is also operating in Western Australia” (Lindsay, 2002, p.78). Recently, in 2004 within Victoria the ‘Spirituality in Social Work Practice Special Interest Group’ was formed (Australian Association of Social Work, 2004). Similar groups have also been established in New South Wales (Lindsay, 2002).

Other indicators of Australian social workers’ interest in issues of spirituality are the initial results arising from the few studies conducted in this area. Craven’s study of 100 Tasmanian social work practitioners found that “the majority considered spirituality to be a legitimate and valid area of social work practice” (Craven, 1997; Rice, 2002, p.308). In 1999, Lindsay’s study of 138 Australian social work educators and academics found that 89% supported the inclusion of spirituality in social work education, although their views varied on the degree of inclusion (Lindsay, 2002, p.48 & 60). Some hold the opinion that

it should be an elective and others thought it should be a compulsory part of the social work program (Lindsay, 2002). These studies provide a tentative indicator of some Australian social workers' interest in spirituality. There are other factors too that can lead us to believe that, while not extensive, there is interest in this topic. These are the brief but explicit references to spiritual and religious issues by social work authors in the areas of community development (Ife, 2002), anti-racist/culturally sensitive practice (Briskman, 2003; Quinn, 2003) and grief and loss (Allan, 2003c). Within Australian social work literature there are also articles and research, which touch on issues that could be considered spiritual by some, without overtly or formally acknowledging and referring to spirituality. For example, in an article by Morley and Ife (2002) entitled 'Social work and a love of humanity'. These authors discuss social work practice involving a 'love of' or faith in humanity. While, this article does not explicitly refer to spirituality there are concepts which could be considered spiritual, such as the ideas of love, compassion, and human connectedness.

Therefore, while it is clear that Australian social workers' engagement with issues of spirituality has not been nearly as extensive as in America, there is some relatively small but explicit interest and also some covert engagement with spirituality in Australian social work literature.

Despite the differences in interest, social workers in western countries often adopt similar approaches to the topics of spirituality and religion. Three main ways of approaching spirituality and religion are evident in the literature. Firstly, some writers focus on particular religious or spiritual perspectives and examine what values, beliefs or frameworks can be drawn from these particular perspectives for social work theory and practice, for example, articles on Buddhism and Social Work, Shamanism and Social Work, and the Journal of Christianity and Social Work (Canda & Furman, 1999; Voss, Douville, Solider & Twiss, 1999; Erlichman, 2001; Brenner & Homonoff, 2004). Secondly, other writers disassociate their engagement with spirituality in social work from religion, and focus mainly on spirituality, often overlooking or devaluing religion (Henery, 2003). More recently, writing on spirituality and social work has proposed that

spirituality be considered both within and outside of a religious context (Canda & Furman, 1999). This approach emphasises diversity, never advocating one particular view. This perspective is most inclusive and it enables social workers to emphasise diversity and to examine spirituality both outside and within a religious context.

There are also similarities evident in the areas being researched by western social workers. The main areas of research across Australia, the United States and the United Kingdom are social workers' own religious and spiritual beliefs (Crave, 1997; Gilbert, 2000; Edwards, 2002, Hodge, 2002; Carroll, 2004), the inclusion of spiritual and religious training in social work education (Sheridan, Wilmer & Atcheson, 1994; Ballinger & Watts, 1996; Dudley & Rice, 1996) and whether social workers are dealing with religious and spiritual matters with clients (Canda & Furman, 1999; Pellebon, Anderson, & Angell, 1999). The majority of this research and literature claims that spirituality is an issue for social workers and it advocates for the inclusion of spirituality and religion in social work education and practice. There are only a few pieces of literature and research that dispute the inclusion of spirituality into social work practice and theory (for example Clarke, 1994; Sullivan, 1994; Weisman, 1997), yet the question of whether or not to include spirituality and religion in social work theory and practice intentionally remains a contentious and debated issue. The following section examines these debates.

Debates in relation to social work & spirituality

What can spirituality contribute to social work practice?

There are spiritual elements embedded in particular social work values and practices. This idea is voiced by Canda and Furman (1999) who view the values of compassion and love to be 'at the heart of helping' and at the heart of social work practice. Canda and Furman (1999) argue that through these values, and their use in practice, there is a spiritual component to social work. They believe that an examination of this spiritual component would contribute immensely to social work practice (Canda & Furman, 1999). This sort of argument emphasises social workers' ability to "revitalize" by

exploring and self-reflecting on an alternative understanding of what it means to be a social worker, one which centres around “fundamental humanity and compassion” (Canda & Furman, 1999, p.4).

While, not forming a similar connection between compassion, humanity and spirituality, other social work scholars have noted the importance of values related to humanity, compassion, love, and human connection in social work. For example, Ife (1997) suggests, “at the core of social work is a vision of humanity” (p.99). Morley, with Ife (2002) also discusses social work as involving a ‘love of humanity’. However, unlike Canda and Furman, Morley and Ife (2002) also consider the possibility that values such as compassion, love and humanity can be used conservatively to detract from a realistic analysis of power and structural influences. They believe this does not have to be the case, that the concept of ‘love of humanity’ can alternatively be used in more progressive practice as a catalyst for the deconstruction of power (Morley & Ife, 2002). Morley and Ife (2002) stress that “implicit in the idea of a ‘love of humanity’ is the need to critique power relations, and in some ways to invert them” (p.75).

While, authors such as Canda and Furman (1999) raise interesting considerations regarding the nature of social work practice and how we understand it, they offer little in the way of an analysis of power and structural relations. Morley and Ife (2002) on the other hand see similar values (e.g. compassion, humanity) as being crucial to social work, while discussing how these ideas can challenge the effects of de-humanising power structures. I believe it is useful to consider perspectives that combine an examination of the spiritual with an analysis of power and structures, so neither aspect is overlooked. Other disciplines, such as theology and philosophy, have argued that power relations are key to spirituality (Lee, 2001). Some feminist writers on spirituality and theology note “the spiritual is personal and political” (King, 1989, p.206), therefore any examination of spirituality requires an analysis of politics. It is this perspective that will be further examined in my thesis, particularly in chapter seven in relation to Joel Kovel’s concept of liberation spirituality.

Spiritual omission leading to discrimination

Social workers need to be aware of and reflect on their religious and spiritual views just as they do around issues of culture, gender and class (Canda & Furman, 1999). Reflecting on spirituality is necessary so that social workers do not impose their religious or spiritual values on clients and communities or devalue people's spiritual views (Lindsay, 2002). Similarly Sermabeikan (1994) believes that social workers need to examine their spiritual and religious perspectives or "spiritual bias" may result, which can be "just as harmful as racism or sexism" (p.179). Cornett (1992) contends that by not considering the spiritual dimension of clients' lives that this in itself represents a perspective on spirituality, a perspective which devalues spirituality through omission.

For many people religious as well as spiritual beliefs will be part of their identity, affecting the way they see themselves in the world. This observation has been made by social workers specialising in anti-racist and culturally sensitive practice. In particular, in relation to clients and communities from non-European indigenous cultures, it has been acknowledged that spirituality influences "their identity and belonging, their relationships, and cultural processes of recovery, healing and change", therefore "spirituality is a fundamental value integrated into every aspect of life" (Quinn, 2003, p.86). Consequently, the marginalisation of spirituality within western society and social work causes indigenous knowledge to be undervalued and undermined (Ife, 1997; Briskman, 2003, p.99). Therefore, in relation to indigenous cultures, to not recognise spirituality can be "a form of cultural racism, and social work practice becomes another forum for domination" (Quinn, 2003, p.86). Therefore social workers need to explore spirituality as well as religion in relation to clients in order to avoid racist and culturally biased practice (Patek, Naik & Humphries, 1998).

Holistic practice

Holism is another argument for encompassing spirituality and religion in social work. Holistic practice in social work involves viewing individuals, families or communities as a complex whole rather than concentrating on one part or aspect of the individual, family

or community (Ife, 2001). The inclusion of spirituality can be seen as an essential component to a more holistic practice.

Spirituality as a strength

It is also worth noting that a considerable portion of literature on spirituality and social work focuses on the contribution spirituality provides in therapeutic and counselling settings (e.g. Edwards, 2002; Northcut, 2002). In particular, spirituality has been seen as being able to contribute to strength-based therapy and counselling. The strengths perspective focuses on helping people to discover and explore their strengths and resources (Saleebey, 1997). People's spiritual worldviews can be a strength, resource, and coping strategy (Rice, 2002). The emphasis here is on how important it is for "the practitioner [to] acknowledge that spirituality in a person's life can be a constructive way of facing life's difficulties" (Sermabeikian, 1994, p.181).

This point has recently been made by several writers (e.g. Washington & Moxley, 2001; Ortiz, & Langer, 2002; Kidd, 2003) particularly in relation the areas of grief and loss, mental health and addiction. For example, Smith (1995) calls for a transpersonal approach (which addresses spirituality) to be included in social work with terminally ill people as a resource to assist their ability to cope with distress. Morell (1996) suggests synthesizing a political and social analysis with a spiritual perspective on addiction to assist the recovery of clients. While Dunbar, Mueller, Medina and Wolf (1998) explore how women living with HIV use spirituality as a coping strategy.

Based on the above literature spirituality and religion can be a significant resource for some people in particular situations. The focus on spirituality as a strength in the social work literature does however focus predominantly on the individual spiritual experience as a strength, rather than on the communal spiritual experience and how this may strengthen communities as well as individuals.

Social workers & spiritual practices

Recently in the United States some social work practitioners have been using and recommending ‘spiritually influenced interventions’ with clients (Rice, 2002). Such interventions include the use of models of spiritual development (mainly based in psychological discourse), spiritual assessments of clients, and spiritual therapeutic methods such as praying with clients, reading spiritual material, meditation and the use of spiritual language (Hodge, 2000, 2001a, 2001b; Rice, 2002). Evaluations of the possible benefits and misuses of these practices have yet to be undertaken (Rice, 2002). These practices raise many ethical issues, but they also indicate the need for research and education into this field in order to prevent spiritually oriented practices occurring without due consideration of their ramifications. Rice (2002) confirms that there is a need to evaluate these practices and to examine the “theoretical and ethical bases which underpin their usage” (p.311).

Ethics

The possibility of overstepping ethical boundaries has been one of the main arguments against the formal inclusion of spiritual and religious matters in social work practice. In 2001, in America the Chronicle of Higher Education posed the question ‘Should spirituality be part of social work?’ (Letters to the Editor, 2001). One of the main concerns raised by social workers engaging in this debate was whether the inclusion of religious and spiritual issues would cause social workers to cross ethical boundaries (Letters to the Editor, 2001). As Canda and Furman (1999) outline, the use of:

“religious or explicit spiritually oriented helping activities remains controversial. For many people, even to consider this sets off fire alarm bells about personal discomfort, violating separation of church and state or client self-determination, blurring the boundary between social work and religious service, and imposing moralistic judgements” (p.262).

The question of whether social workers would impose their own spiritual and religious beliefs onto clients or students, and the ethical implications of this, was of particular concern (Letters to the Editor, 2001).

There have been few ethical guidelines to shape and monitor the developing field of social work and spirituality. In 1999 the Australian Association of Social Workers held a National Ethics Committee which referred to religion as a basis for “prejudice and conflicts of interest”, and it also included “specific reference to spirituality as a basis for conscientious objection” (Rice, 2002, p.304-305). Similarly, in the United Kingdom and in the United States social work bodies have included anti-discrimination components in regards to people’s religious and spiritual perspectives. The United Kingdom’s Social Work Education and Training Council (CCETSW) has “commissioned publications” on social work and spirituality and the American Council of Social Work Education has “recently published an annotated bibliography devoted entirely to Spirituality and Social Work practice” (Lindsay, 2002, p.31). However there is still a significant absence of professional training or guidelines addressing the ethics of this field. While some research has considered the ethics involved with introducing spiritual and religious issues into social work practice and education it is still a significantly underdeveloped area (Canda & Furman, 1999; Canda, Nakashima, & Furman, 2004). There needs to be more research into the ethics of social work practices that include a spiritual component.

Spiritual expertise

Social workers have been critiqued for being involved with spiritual issues because these issues are not our area of ‘expertise’. One letter to the editor in the Chronicle of Higher Education debating this issue noted that social workers are “not spiritual counsellors” (Letters to the Editor, 2001, p.20). Tacey (2003) challenges the notion of ‘spiritual expert’. He claims that with a decrease in people’s participation in traditional religion and an increased interest in spirituality outside a religious context, there has been a shift away from knowledge on spirituality being primarily guided by ‘experts’ (such as clergy and theologians). This has meant a move towards people defining and expressing their own spirituality (Tacey, 2003). Within social work practice the emphasis is often placed on

client self-determination (Canda & Furman, 1999), therefore, social workers need not have the 'expertise' to deal with spiritual issues. Clients and communities determine their own spiritual values and knowledge, and subsequently are 'experts' on their own spirituality. This is not to say that social workers should not develop their knowledge on the topics of spirituality and religion and be informed, but that in dealing with religious and spiritual issues with clients and communities social workers should not claim to have the expertise to guide other people's spirituality.

Material & Spiritual

It has also been contended that a focus on spirituality within social work will distract from a focus on material conditions of people's lives. However, spirituality can be incorporated into social work without detracting from the social context and the structural factors influencing people's lives. While some writers in the field of social work and spirituality primarily draw attention to spirituality having a transcendental aspect (e.g. Joseph, 1988; Cascio, 1998), spirituality based on a non-dualist understanding does not separate the material from the spiritual aspects of people's lives. This is reflected in many feminist writings on spirituality which advocate for the dissolution of dualist understandings of spirituality and seek to promote an acknowledgement of spiritual perspectives as interacting with the social and material realities of people's lives (King, 1989). King suggests that spirituality "is not just an exclusive exploration of interiority and inwardness, but closely interwoven with all other dimensions of human experience including social and political life" (1989, p.90). Acknowledgement and examination of spiritual and religious aspects of people's lives does not necessarily detract from the social, economic and political conditions.

Social justice and spirituality

For some people social justice is an integral part of their spirituality. For example, the Family Centre in New Zealand who link social justice to spirituality in their work with families (Waldegrave, Tamasese, Tuhaka & Campbell, 2003). They describe, for example, the relationship between people as sacred and domestic violence as a violation

of this sacredness (Waldegrave, Tamasese, Tuhaka & Campbell, 2003). There are also individual social workers who link their understandings of social justice to spirituality. For example, as outline by Rice (2002):

- Abels “describes spirituality within social work practice as a belief in the search for social justice and the desire to further the practice of respect for all persons” (p.306)
- Harris “describes spirituality as the driving force behind her sense of social justice, social responsibility and consequently her social work practice” (p.306)

Others have made a connection between spirituality and social justice by drawing on the examples of “two of the most influential community organizers of this century, Mohandas Gandhi and Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., [who] claimed that the greatest source of power to sustain social justice action comes from beyond the personal, from the universal or divine” (Robbins, Chatterjee & Canda, 1998, p.391). They draw on examples such as these to illustrate that “spirituality can...motivate action towards social justice” (Robbins, Chatterjee & Canda, 1998, p.17).

While there can be a connection made between social justice and spirituality, there also may be conflict between some types of spiritual and religious perspectives and social justice (Clarke, 1994, Canda & Furman, 1999; Lindsay, 2002). How might social workers deal with tensions between a social work practice that emphasises social justice and therefore combats heterosexism and homophobia, and some religious views that maintain a negative view of homosexuality? How do social workers remain respectful of people’s religious and spiritual beliefs when they conflict with and oppose social justice? Is there a way to acknowledge and respect their beliefs overall, while challenging their particular perspectives that oppose social justice? Is it appropriate to challenge their views? What if there is a heightened level of complexity involved in the interaction between social justice and a person’s religious and spiritual perspectives? For example, a woman’s religious and/or spiritual beliefs might give her cultural affirmation and a sense of community and connectedness, which empower her, but at the same time the patriarchal and hierarchical nature of her religious and/or spiritual beliefs reinforce gender inequality

and in relation to gender cause her to feel disempowered⁶. The relationship between social justice and spirituality will be explored in further detail in chapter seven, through an exploration of liberation spirituality.

Current conceptual approaches to social work and spirituality

While there are some exceptions mentioned, on the whole there is still little in-depth connection being made between emancipation politics and spirituality within the social work, particularly theoretically and conceptually. This is not surprising considering the overall underdevelopment of theoretical and conceptual ways of framing spiritual issues in social work. In this section I will outline current conceptual approaches being used in the field of social work and spirituality (transpersonal psychology, holistic models, models of spiritual development and spiritually sensitive social work practice) and consider their benefits, shortcomings and their overall ability to engage with the underdeveloped area of emancipatory politics and spirituality.

Transpersonal psychology

Transpersonal psychology has its roots in humanistic psychology of the 1950's and 1960's (Canda & Furman, 1999; Ferrer, 2002). There have been many influential transpersonal writers such as Karl Maslow, Carl Jung, Stanislav Grof and more recently Ken Wilber (Canda & Furman, 1999; Ferrer, 2002). Although drawing on understandings from Eastern spiritual traditions, transpersonal psychology is heavily based in developmental psychology, western humanism and has a scientific approach to spirituality. As a consequence it is predominantly shaped by western understandings and assumptions. While there is more than one approach to transpersonal psychology the general focus is on spiritual experiences and “altered states of consciousness, the spiritual development process, and therapeutic techniques that facilitate transpersonal awareness” (Canda & Furman, 1999, p.162).

⁶ For more information on social justice in relation to religion see AnNa'im, A.A., Gort, H., Jansen, H. & Vroom, H.M. 1995, *Human rights and religious values: An uneasy relationship?* William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI.

The term transpersonal literally means to transcend or go beyond the personal (Robbins, Chatterjee & Canda, 1998). Central to transpersonal theories is the assumption that there is a higher state of consciousness and that this state “extends beyond (trans) the individual or personal to encompass wider aspects of humankind, life, psyche or cosmos” (Damianakis, 2001, p.26). This understanding of a transpersonal level contains an underlying optimism, a belief that people are naturally geared towards growth and development, and that this human development is “purposeful and goal oriented” (Canda & Furman, 1999, p.164).

Some authors have suggested that social workers should engage with religious and spiritual issues by using transpersonal theories (e.g. Canda, 1991; Cowley, 1993; Cowley & Derezotes, 1994; Smith, 1995, Robbins, Chatterjee & Canda, 1998). Cowley (1993) believes that just as there is a transpersonal psychology, that there should be a ‘transpersonal social work’ in order to adequately address spiritual issues in social work. Others have stated that social workers should use specific authors who have influenced transpersonal theories such as Carl Jung (Borenzweig, 1984; Sermabeikian, 1994). However, transpersonal approaches have drawn significant criticism.

Firstly, as Robbins, Chatterjee and Canda (1998) argue the majority of transpersonal psychologists do not take account of the “macro political dynamics and issues of oppression and injustice” (Robbins, Chatterjee & Canda, 1998, p.389). Therefore, transpersonal approaches fail to consider issues such as “sexism, ethnocentrism, [and] heterosexism” (Robbins, Chatterjee & Canda, 1998, p.388). In general transpersonal theories also emphasise spirituality as opposed to religion, causing religion to be neglected (Robbins, Chatterjee & Canda, 1998). Further the majority of transpersonal theories have been criticised for their inability to recognise the significance of people’s cultural and historical contexts in shaping and informing their spirituality (Robbins, Chatterjee & Canda, 1998). They draw predominantly from western views of spirituality, applying these views to other cultures and people, and so stand to be imperialistic and oppressive (Robbins, Chatterjee & Canda, 1998).

Transpersonal theories could also be seen as oppressive when they confine spiritual understandings and awareness to hierarchical levels of development. The hierarchical understandings of spirituality, which underlie many transpersonal approaches, imply that there are 'low' and 'higher' spiritual states and levels and that there is a 'right' and a 'wrong' way to be spiritual. Following on from this, is the idea prevalent in transpersonal psychology that people's level of spiritual development can be assessed and improved. This raises many issues regarding the power imbalances at play between psychologists and clients (or social workers and clients). If workers place themselves in a position to assess and judge a clients' spiritual development as 'high' or 'low' there will be a clear power imbalance.

It has also been contended that transpersonal theorists attempt to legitimate spirituality through drawing it into a scientific discourse (Ferrer, 2002). Ferrer (2002) argues that "the efforts to legitimate spiritual knowledge by appealing to its scientific status may be both misleading and counterproductive" (p. 41). It reduces spiritual inquiry to the methods of natural sciences and it is "highly questionable to import language and epistemic categories emerging from the study of the natural world to account for the validity of knowledge in all domains of human reality (arts, literature, economics, politics, spirituality...)" (Ferrer, 2002, p.58). Ferrer contends that science is focused on describing the world while spiritual (as well as social and art) "endeavours are aimed not so much at describing human nature and the world, but at *engaging them in creative, participatory, and transformative ways*, and [they] therefore have different goals, methods and standards of validity" (2002, p.58).

Another criticism levelled at transpersonal theorists is that they focus too much on the individual. Even though some transpersonal theorists (e.g. Rothberg, 1993) claim to look beyond the personal to people's connection with others and the universe, the individual is still at the centre of their theories. In these theories it is the self that people need to develop and go beyond, making the self central. Overall transpersonal approaches lack the ability to engage adequately with a social analysis which I believe is necessary in social work.

Holistic Models

Many writers have advocated for a holistic model of social work practice that includes a spiritual aspect (e.g. Cornett, 1992; Ife, 1997; Robbins, Chatterjee & Canda, 1998; Canda & Furman, 1999). In particular, these writers have drawn on the person-in environment approach, or what is often referred to as the bio-psycho-social model and contend that this model of holistic social work practice needs to include a consideration of spirituality (Canda & Furman, 1999). The bio-psycho-social model was originally introduced into social work practice with the intent of forming a more holistic understanding of the client in the environment. This model aims at forming a more complex picture of the multiple factors (biological, psychological and social) influencing clients instead of focusing on one aspect or part of people's lives. The bio-psycho-social model is "presented as an analysis of 'the interplay of biological, psychological, social and cultural elements of development in the life space of individuals'" (Pease, 2003, p. 187). But this perspective has been challenged on the basis that it fails "to provide an adequate analysis of the relationship between the person and the social context" (Pease, 2003, p.187). Similarly, most writers supporting and recommending a holistic social work practice that includes a spiritual component have not provided an adequate analysis of the relationship between people's spirituality and the social context. Most simply attach spirituality to the pre-existing bio-psycho-social model. When they do conduct a more in-depth analysis and incorporate spiritual factors into the bio-psycho-social model they mainly focus on the interplay between psycho-spiritual factors. The bio-psycho-social perspective (without an inclusion of spiritual issues) has also been critiqued for its inability to "move beyond the specifics of human psychology" (Pease, 2003, p. 188). The intention of this model to be holistic is obscured by its tendency to over emphasise psychology (Pease, 2003).

I believe the limitations within the bio-psycho-social model subsequently affect any suggested engagement this model has with the spiritual component of people's lives. These faults cause a bio-psycho-social-spiritual model to over emphasise psychological factors and neglect the social context. So, this means that even with the introduction of spirituality this model does not capture the whole or complex picture.

Models of Spiritual Development

Most models of spiritual development involve stages or levels of spiritual development through which individuals are said to pass. These models suggest that each stage occurs in sequence through an individual's life cycle (Bullis 1999; Canda & Furman, 1999; Hodge, 2001a; Hodge, 2001b). For example Fowler's model of faith include the stages of "intuitive-projective faith", "mythic-literal faith", "synthetic-conventional", "individuative-reflective faith", "conjunctive faith" and "universalizing faith" (Fowler, 1981; Lindsay, 2002, p.89). Fowler primarily argues that from childhood to adulthood, "over time, people refine and change their contents of faith...moving to more advanced stages of faith" (Fowler, 1981; Canda & Furman, 1999, p.229). Even when used heuristically, most models impose "theoretical structure...on clients' spiritual experience" (Hodge, 2001a, p.206). Hodge believes "rather than accepting clients' stories on their own terms, stage theories attempt to understand clients' spiritual reality in light of a particular level on a predetermined, sequential series of stages" (Hodge, 2001a, p.206). Therefore models of spiritual development can also obscure a client-centred approach, and restrict people's spiritual understandings to stages.

Framing people's spirituality within spiritual models, even when acknowledging them as heuristic devices, shapes spirituality in a standardised and categorised way and limits diverse and flexible understandings. The nature of spirituality as a rich human experience, does not lend itself to the simplification through such models.

Spiritually Sensitive Social Work Practice

Developed by Canda and Furman (1999), who have both spent a number of years cultivating and contributing to the field of social work and spirituality, spiritually sensitive social work practice is a framework of knowledge, values, concepts, and activities. This framework is detailed in their book *Spiritual Diversity in Social Work Practice: The Heart of Helping*, and is described as a "generic and inclusive framework...that is applicable to a wide range of religious and nonreligious clients", and

can be “tailored to the particular spiritual perspective of a given client” (Canda & Furman, 1999, p.183). At the centre of this framework, shaping and informing it, are the following key concepts, values and principles:

- Respect for diversity and the inclusion of religious and nonreligious spiritual perspectives (Canda & Furman, 1999).
- Upholding ethical principles of social work practice (Canda & Furman, 1999).
- Client self-determination – working with the client’s systems of meaning or ‘starting where the client is at’ (Canda & Furman, 1999)
- Respectful and sensitive manner towards clients (Canda & Furman, 1999).
- Self-reflection – “the workers being aware of their own values (value-clarification) via self-reflection” (Rice, 2002, p.310).
- Addressing the whole person – using “the concept of holistic practice as defined by the bio-psycho-social-spiritual approach to human functioning” (Rice, 2002, p.310).
- Assisting client’s spiritual growth and development (Canda & Furman, 1999).

Social justice is not central to Canda and Furman’s framework. Furthermore, Canda and Furman’s framework does not examine community in-depth. By focusing on the individual or the “micro level” of practice this framework has subsequently only really examined individual spirituality (Canda & Furman, 1999, p.308). Even when exploring the spirituality of individuals in connection to their relationship with other people the focus of this framework is on the individual or self interacting with others, or the individual in the community. This framework does not cover the issue of communal spirituality or the broader social influences and implications of spirituality. From my perspective this examination is essential. The importance of this is illustrated by Kovel’s (1991) assertion that the social influence of capitalism has contributed to the de-valuing and marginalisation of spirituality. Another example is the need to consider communal spirituality or the influences of spiritual issues when working with indigenous communities, and the possible impact and implications of social factors/issues (such as

colonialism and the dispossession of land) on their spirituality (Waldegrave, Tamasese, Tuhaka & Campbell, 2003).

While Canda and Furman's (1999) framework has contributed key concepts and values, such as client-centred and ethically guided practice, this framework is limited as it does not engage with communal spirituality and the social influences and implications of spirituality.

Conclusion

There is great diversity and complexity within social workers' engagement with spirituality, however within social work for the most part it remains in the margins. But this developing field is grappling with vital issues such as the importance of religion and spirituality to culturally sensitive/anti-racist practice, its contribution to strengths based social work and its ability to provide an alternative view of what it means to be a social worker. Overall, this field raises a number of issues and important questions regarding the place of religion and spirituality in social work. However, many aspects such as communal spirituality and ethics have been given minimal attention. Particularly, I believe there is a significant need to address the underdeveloped connection between spirituality and emancipatory politics. Current theoretical and conceptual approaches in the field of social work and spirituality do not provide a conceptual connection between emancipatory politics and spiritual issues. This connection will be explored in the following sections of the thesis through focusing on critical theory approaches to social work which hold emancipatory politics at the centre.

CHAPTER FOUR – CRITICAL SOCIAL WORK IN THE MODERNIST TRADITION

This chapter focuses on critical theory and its engagement with spirituality, and spiritual aspects of emancipatory politics are explored. The focus then narrows to critical social work in the modernist tradition. Modernity is discussed in relation to critical social work and to spirituality. I conclude by arguing that critical social work from a modernist tradition is not an adequate theoretical stance to use in order to approach spiritual issues in social work.

Critical theory & critical social work: Key beliefs

The origins of critical theory have been located in the establishment of the Institute of Social Research at Frankfurt University in 1923 (which was later called the ‘Frankfurt School’) (Habermas, 1986; Bessant & Watts, 1999; Bronner, 2002; Geuss, 2004). This school of thought was distinct from the more traditional schools of its time. The difference was in its focus on social critique and its body of works directed towards changing society (Fay, 1987). It is through the Frankfurt School theorists that the term ‘critical theory’ and the associated characteristics were founded.

Contemporary critical theory is said to refer to not one theoretical perspective or body of thought but rather a cluster of theories with particular characteristics (Mullaly, 2002). A main characteristic of critical theory is how it links people’s beliefs and experience of oppression to socio-political structures (Pease, Allan & Briskman, 2003). In forming this link critical theorists criticise domination, and are driven by goals of emancipation (Rush, 2004). The goal of emancipation, the intention of forming a more emancipatory and just society, is particularly important in critical theory. It is committed to changing the current social order, in which inequalities are common (Fay, 1987; White, 2004). This characteristic distinguishes it from other more traditional social theories that attempt to understand and explain the social world. Mullaly (2002) lists several theories that can be considered critical, such as “liberation theology, Freire’s pedagogy of the oppressed, some forms...of feminist theory, structural social work theory, and post-colonial theory”

(p.17). These examples indicate a broad range of critical theories with different foci and ways of approaching social change. However, all critical theorists embrace common principles including connecting people's beliefs and experiences of oppression to social structures, a critique of domination, and the goal of emancipation.

Social work theory and practice embracing the above characteristics was not originally referred to as critical social work. Such 'non-traditional' approaches were initially referred to as radical social work, which developed in the 1970's (Pease & Fook, 1999). These forms of social work were predominantly informed by Marxist theory, rather than the Frankfurt theorists (Martin, 2003). In the late 1970's structural social work began to be articulated and was prevalent throughout the 1980's and 1990's (Pease & Fook, 1999). Canadian social worker Maurice Moreau is "generally credited with the initial naming of the structural approach", which was further developed by social worker Bob Mullaly (Pease & Fook, 1999, p. 8). Both radical and structural social work had in common a focus on "structural determinants of personal problems" and a focus on social change (Pease & Fook, 1999, p. 8). Other forms of social work, with critical characteristics, include some forms of feminist social work, and anti-discriminatory and anti-oppressive approaches to social work (Martin, 2003). More recently the term critical social work began to emerge to describe social work theories and practices with characteristics of critical theories (Martin, 2003).

Spirituality & critical social work

As I have read critical social work literature I have been left wondering about the place of spirituality. Is it a missing dimension? I have only found several references to spirituality in the critical social work literature. In *Critical Social Work: An Introduction to Theories and Practices* (Allan, Pease & Briskman, 2003) several authors explicitly, but briefly, discuss or make reference to spiritual issues in social work practice. In relation to anti-racist and culturally affirming practice Quinn and Briskman both discuss the importance of spirituality to indigenous peoples (Briskman, 2003; Quinn, 2003). Briskman (2003) suggests that the devaluing of spirituality within western society has contributed to the marginalisation of indigenous knowledge, and Quinn (2003) considers how marginalising

and dismissing spiritual issues in social work can be a form of “cultural racism” (p.86). In the area of grief and loss, Allan (2003c) touches on the effects of secularisation, spirituality and religion. Pease (2003) comments in his endnotes that the inclusion of spirituality in critical social work thinking could lead to new and alternative understandings of self and society.

In *Rethinking Social Work: Towards a Critical Practice* Ife (1997) argues that in order to have a holistic understanding of the person-in-environment and to have a culturally sensitive/anti-racist practice, issues of spirituality should be considered in critical social work (Ife, 1997). Ife (1997) goes on to acknowledge that spiritual issues have “by and large occupied a deviant or marginal position within mainstream social work education, research, writing and practice” (p.11). He believes that “for many people spirituality is a critically important component of the human condition” and therefore should be considered in social work (Ife, 1997, p.9). Wong (2004) also discusses spirituality, specifically exploring the benefits of including spiritual understandings into critical social work education.

Despite the brief references identified above, on the whole spiritual issues appear to be largely absent from Australian critical social work literature. As said earlier, I have asked myself ‘is this a missing dimension from critical social work?’ Or, ‘is it more a hidden dimension?’ This next section explores these questions through examining the links between spirituality and emancipation.

Spiritual aspects of emancipatory politics

Emancipation involves struggle and one of the major barriers to emancipation has been identified by writers as fatalism or surplus powerlessness. Mullaly (2002) writes about “the impact or pervasiveness of ‘fatalism’ as a powerful mechanism of social control” (p.130). It involves the acceptance of the world the way it is, and removes hope in the possibility of change (Mullaly, 2002). It causes people to question social change and see it as unrealistic. Lerner (1991) refers to a similar concept, ‘surplus powerlessness’. He writes:

“There really is a structure of power in the world – it is not easy to change. But apart from this real powerlessness, our encounters with real powerlessness are often misinterpreted in ways that make us think of ourselves as even more powerless than we really are. This is what I mean by Surplus Powerlessness – the way that we see ourselves as lacking the real power, limited though it is, that we really do have. It is our Surplus Powerlessness that keeps us from making the changes that we actually could make. Surplus Powerlessness is not just a belief – it’s a whole way of approaching reality, a ‘way of life’. It embodies our feelings, our thoughts, our perceptions of who we are and who we could be” (Lerner, 1991, p.3).

Lerner (1991) contends that surplus powerlessness is central to emancipatory politics:

“surplus powerlessness is not just some ‘other’ problem in politics – it is central and critical. No movement can succeed for any length of time without confronting the ways that its participants have been shaped by Surplus Powerlessness. We should recognise that every political decision will be influenced by the ways that the Social Unconscious shapes our perceptions of what is possible” (p.285).

Kovel (1988) identifies a similar theme in emancipatory politics. He describes what could be called the effects of fatalism or surplus powerlessness, “apathy, inertia, despair, cynicism – these are the accurate descriptions for the present state of radical possibilities...” in the west (p.326). While, real structural power inequalities exist which are difficult to change, part of oppression is to make the current order of things appear natural and unchangeable. So much so that people become cynical and exhibit apathy about the possibility of change.

Lerner (1991) believes surplus powerlessness is stronger today than it was during the social movements of the 1960's and 1970's. He considers this is because of material changes such as the failure of communism (Lerner, 1991). Other factors may also be involved, particularly the neglect of the immaterial and less tangible aspects of emancipatory politics such as hope, vision, aspirations, convictions, love, faith, and inspiration. These aspects are often portrayed as 'soft' because they are intangible, and therefore they are not seen as belonging to the realm of politics. Politics is understood to be dealing with material reality and the place of the immaterial is not recognised or valued. This split is partly due to the dominance of mind-rational thought, particularly in academic discussions of emancipatory politics. The intangible or 'immaterial' factors become associated with marginalised emotional and spiritual ways of knowing. However, people can and do talk about a passion for politics and a desire for change, but they rarely explore what is behind this, the passion and the desire.

There are writers in related fields of practice to social work who do address these concepts. Kovel is one person who sees these and other 'intangible' or 'non-material' concepts as crucial to the success of emancipatory politics and in fact, embedded in people's desire and passion for social change. Paulo Freire, a prominent advocate for radical education and emancipation, spoke of faith in relation to emancipatory politics writing that dialogue for emancipatory purposes requires "an intense faith in mankind [humankind], faith in his [and her] power to make and remake, to create and re-create, faith in his [and her] vocation to be more fully human" (1972, p.79). Faith is an aspect also emphasised by Kovel; "no revolution, no matter how ripe the opportunity, can ever be made unless people are animated by faith, unless they are grasped by the spirit" (1988, p.326). Faith is the belief in something which is not physically seen and that seems unlikely. If the suffragettes, for example, did not have faith or a belief in a different world, one where women could vote, would they have continued to fight?

Faith in emancipatory politics has been connected to the idea of a vision. Kovel (1988; 1991) argues that a critique of domination is not sufficient, that for emancipation to occur

an alternative vision is necessary, a vision of a society without domination and oppression. And then there must be faith in that vision:

“emancipation...has to be made but first envisioned...If it can’t exist in the mind, then it can’t exist in reality – and that is the way things are set up to work so far as radical change goes. It has to be unthinkable, and so impossible – unless there is some vision of non-existent, something to leap towards: some faith” (Kovel, 1988, p.325).

Vision and faith are essential to social change challenging emancipation.

The stronger and more vivid an alternative vision, the more likely social change will occur. Oppression tends to remove the possibility that there can be an alternative. Therefore one of the steps to overcoming oppression is to envision alternatives. If there is no hope for or belief in an emancipatory reality or an alternative to oppression, then there is no alternative to reach for. The work of Martin Luther King illustrates this point very well. Although there were many contributing factors to the changes brought about the 1960’s black civil rights movement, one significant contributing factor was the faith and vision articulated by Martin Luther King in his ‘I have a dream’ speech delivered at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington D.C on August 28, 1963 (National Library of Australia, 2005). The following is an extract:

“I have a dream that one day the state of Alabama, whose governor’s lips are presently dripping with the words of interposition and nullification, will be transformed into a situation where little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and girls and walk together as sisters and brothers. I have a dream today. I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight, and the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together. This is our hope. This is the faith with which I return to the South. With

this faith we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood. With this faith we will be able to work together, to pray together, to struggle together, to go to jail together, to stand up for freedom together, knowing that we will be free one day” (National Library of Australia, 2005).

Envisioning a powerful new reality, gave people something to strive for, something to help inspire and sustain social action. As Weaver (1982), an author on feminist spirituality articulates, forming an alternative image of society “is a necessary first step in our efforts to bring about social change, particularly for those changes that most radically depart from our present condition. It is a powerful tool that we do not fully understand or use...” (p.248). Beh (1982), another author on feminist spirituality, also emphasises that forming an alternative image of society is a “radical tool that can help us build inner confidence and dissipate crippling fears...To realize our goals, we must first imagine them fully” (p.126).

Kovel (1991) points out however that this process does not belong to emancipatory politics alone, but can also serve other purposes. He draws on the example of Nazism to illustrate this point, arguing that Hitler also envisioned a clear alternative reality to the one that was present. Although it was not emancipatory it did inspire people to join him and created a belief in this alternative possibility, that of an Arian race (Kovel, 1991). With this example Kovel argues that “we cannot simply draw an equation between what is spiritual and what is good” (Kovel 1991, p.3). This argument is complex and contested. Can Nazism be called ‘spiritual’ because it envisioned an alternative reality? Can spirituality be called ‘bad’? My intention is not to enter into this argument but rather to conclude that envisioning can be used for both emancipatory and repressive purposes. Given that it can be both emancipatory and repressive and given its importance to successful emancipatory movements it is essential that critical social work theorists begin to acknowledge the role of envisioning in their politics.

Hope is another aspect of emancipatory politics which will be explored here. Hopelessness and despair have been identified earlier as major obstacles to emancipatory action. Hope can be, and has been a useful counter to despair. Freire writes:

“Hopelessness is a form of silence, of denying the world and fleeing from it. The dehumanisation resulting from an unjust order is not a cause for despair but for hope, leading to the incessant pursuit of the humanity denied by injustice. Hope, however, does not consist in crossing one’s arms and waiting. As long as I fight, I am moved by hope; and if I fight with hope, then I can wait. As the encounter of men [and women] seeking to be more fully human, dialogue cannot be carried on in a climate of hopelessness. If the dialoguers expect nothing to come of their efforts, their encounter will be empty and sterile, bureaucratic and tedious” (1972, p.80).

While working with a client who suffered from depression in the context of child protection I asked her what she wanted most, she stated ‘hope’. Hope is a basic human need, and because emancipation politics is about social change it is ultimately about people, changing the way people think and interact. In order for any emancipatory movement to be successful we need to have an understanding of people’s needs. Hope is a need and we should understand this and know what people are hoping for.

Another aspect to emancipatory politics is the liberation of the human spirit. Starhawk writes that emancipatory politics is “spiritual because it is addressed to the liberation of the human spirit, to healing our fragmentations, to becoming whole...because it changes consciousness, it expands our awareness and gives us a new vision” of reality (1999, p.225). As quoted at the beginning of my thesis, Kovel (1991) also makes a connection between emancipatory politics and the liberation of the human spirit:

“Slaves and serfs discovered it according to the unfolding of the conditions of their domination. Luther discovered it, and Thomas Munzer,

and countless religious radicals since; as did Blake, Tom Paine and the antireligious philosophes of the eighteenth century, and Marx and Engels of the century to follow. The abolitionists discovered it, and the suffragettes, along with Rosa Luxemburg, Emma Goldman, Gandhi, Cesar Augustso Sandino, Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, Frantz Fanon, Aime Cesaire, Ho Chi Minh, and Fidel Castro. And women and men in occupied territories all over the world discover it and rediscover it every day...the basic motion of human spirit” (Kovel, 1991, p.110)

Hope, faith, the human spirit, and envisioning a new reality: these ideas and spiritual aspects are central to emancipatory politics, but as we have seen they are rarely explicitly acknowledged in critical social work literature. While they may be considered to be ‘immaterial’ or less tangible they may in fact hold a key to why some emancipatory movements are more successful than others.

How do critical social work theorists engage with these ideas?

Critical social work theorists and practitioners often discuss engaging with communities and clients, building rapport, empathising with people and the use of self in practice. All of these factors are essentially about human connection, but this is not explicitly discussed. ‘Immaterial’ factors such as faith and hope are essential to emancipatory politics. But there is little space given to these factors in critical social work theory. Essentially spiritual and emotional factors are hidden and marginalised in critical social work theory because they are not considered to be valid realms of knowledge.

Critical social work theory can be seen as having two broad approaches - modernist and postmodernist – and these approaches have different potential for engaging with spiritual factors. In the following sections I discuss modernity, and give an overview and critique of critical work in the modernist tradition showing how modernity devalues spiritual knowledge. This demonstrates some of the reasons why critical social work in the modernist tradition does not explicitly discuss spirituality, but is rather dismissive of it.

Modernity

Modernism, as a body of thought, is often claimed to be the child of the Enlightenment (Crotty, 1998). The Enlightenment was an “intellectual movement of the seventeenth-eighteenth centuries”, which offered “assurance of unambiguous and accurate knowledge of the world” through reason and rationality (Crotty, 1998, p.184-185 & p.18). This period of Enlightenment was the “self-proclaimed Age of Reason”, which was said to be a “radical and permanent break with the alleged irrationality and superstition of preceding ages” (Crotty, 1998, p.18 & p.185).

Following Enlightenment’s absolute belief in the power of reason to gain unbiased knowledge of the world, modernist thought invests “great faith in the ability of reason to discover absolute forms of knowledge” (Crotty, 1998, p.185). Modernists contend that there is universal and absolute knowledge, and that truth can be discovered and attained (Crotty, 1998). Part of the assumption underlying this belief is that “truth and knowledge exist as objective reality” and as such, they can be discovered and attained through objective means (Mullaly, 2002, p.17). Given the valuing of ‘objectivity’, ‘reason’ and ‘rationality’, it is no surprise that science holds a dominant position in modernism. In modernism “science and the scientific method are paraded as the paramount way in which this self-professed universal and valid hold on reality is achieved” (Crotty, 1998, p.185). This emphasis on science and objectivity contributes to a division whereby people are seen as separate from the world and looking upon the world (normally from the top-down) ‘objectively’ to make ‘neutral’ judgements and assessments that can lead to the discovery and attainment of knowledge (Weber, 2001). This view that knowledge can be possessed and controlled contributes to modernists’ preoccupation with the “creation of order, boundaries, classifications” and labels, which is part of the process of trying to control and possess knowledge (Pease, Allan, Briskman, 2003, p.3).

With this preoccupation with the formation of categories and labels, comes the dualist thinking which is often pivotal in modernist western thought (Ife, 2001; Crotty, 1998). Dualism “makes divisions into two dichotomous and opposing categories: mind/body, male/female, right/wrong, radical/conservative...” (Ife, 2001, p.66). It leads to

“constantly dividing instead of uniting, and it excludes rather than includes” (Ife, 2001, p.66). Categories formulated under dualist thinking are often applied universally across cultures and contexts under modernism.

The overall purpose behind a modernists’ search for universal knowledge and certainty is the core belief that emancipation or “the betterment of the human condition” can be found through universal knowledge (Mullaly, 2002, p.17; Pease, Allan & Briskman, 2003). In seeking this knowledge for such a purpose, this world, and our history in it, is seen as having a “definite and progressive direction” towards the goal of emancipation or betterment (Pease, Allan, & Briskman, 2003, p.3).

Critical social work in a modernist tradition: Overview & critique

Broadly, critical social work in the modernist traditions can generally be described as involving the following:

“a recognition that large scale social processes, particularly those associated with class, race and gender, contribute fundamentally to the personal and social issues social workers encounter in their practice; the adoption of self-reflective and critical stance to the often contradictory effects of social work practice and social policies...working with and for oppressed populations to achieve social transformation” (Healy, 2001, p.2).

This approach has contributed a great deal to social work, by providing “a lens for challenging social injustice and social inequality through social transformation” (Allan, 2003a, p.49). Modernist approaches to critical social work also provide “ways for analysing and strategising responses to disadvantage” (Allan, 2003a, p.49). However, there are several key criticisms of this approach. Firstly, it is criticised in relation to its understanding of power. Power within critical social work in the modernist tradition is seen to be primarily “coercive” (Allan, 2003a, p.48) and a “possession” held by the dominant groups in society over those that are oppressed and disadvantaged (Parker,

Fook, & Pease, 1999, p.155). This understanding restricts power to one main location (the top), and constructs a view of oppression as somewhat inescapable. More focus on power within oppressed groups and on how dominant forces are resisted would allow critical modernist social work theorists to have a less restrictive and deeper understanding of power.

A second criticism is that this approach does not adequately consider the individual in relation to oppression, with its emphasis on social structures and political/economic systems (Fook & Pease, 1999; Healy, 2001). The modernist approaches to critical social work tend to draw attention to social injustices at a structural level (for example capitalist systems cultivating class oppression) and seek change at a structural level (for example through lobbying the government for policy changes) (Pease & Fook, 1999; Allan, 2003a; Allan, 2003b). While the structural level of change is important the “active agency of individuals and their capacity to create change” is overlooked (Allan, 2003a, p.47). Consideration needs to be given to how people are shaped by society and to “the human being as [an] active agent, exercising free will and contributing to his or her circumstance...” (Kondrat, 2002, p.436).

A third criticism of critical social work from a modernist tradition is the importance placed on rationality. As Fook (2002) argues, rational thought and awareness of oppression is believed to lead to transformative action. Some writers challenge the modernist assumption that “people can change the way they live through rational thought and action” (Healy, 2000; Healy, 2001; Allan, 2003a, p.44), and argue that the “rationalist understanding of experience (that awareness will lead to action)” is simplistic (Fook, 2002, p.61). For example, holding anti-racist views rationally and intellectually does not necessarily prevent people from acting in a racist manner. Being aware and conscious of oppression does not automatically lead to transformative action. Also, rationality does not necessary counter the irrationality within oppression (for example racism can be filled with irrational fear and hatred).

The emphasis on universality and certainty of knowledge within critical social work from a modernist tradition is a fourth area of critique. This emphasis creates incapacity to account for diversity and differences and between and within oppressed groups (Ife, 1997; Pease & Fook, 1999; Leonard, 2001). This view of universal knowledge has also been said to create a search for “one underlying causal explanation for phenomena” (that is one cause for oppression) (Fook & Pease, 1999, p.228). Mullaly (2002) reminds us that theories cannot provide “iron-clad guaranteed explanations of social phenomena because the human condition and social conditions are too complex to formulate universal laws” (p.2). In addition there is then a question of whether this vision or direction will be representative, if diverse and multiple voices can be expressed. However, as Ife (1997) points out, a positive aspect of the modernist understandings of knowledge as certain and universal is that it does provide a unified and strong vision and direction for human rights and social justice, which makes the process of social transformation more reachable.

A fifth critique of this approach concerns the pattern of dualism, the categories of oppressive/anti-oppressive, empowerment/disempowerment or oppressed/oppressor. While attempting to overcome dualist understandings in their connection of the personal to the political, critical social work in the modernist tradition carries modernist assumptions and limitations. The limitations of modernism include an inability to hold two seemingly contrasting elements together. Furthermore, by the use of dualist categorises and labels modernist understandings of critical social work are not equipped to accommodate the complexities and contrasts at play within inequalities and oppression (for example a person being both the oppressor and the oppressed). With its modernist based assumptions of universality, certainty, rationality and its tendency to categorise, it is no surprise that this approach to critical social work is described by some as “overly prescriptive”, and that it has “silenced local features of practice” (Allan, 2003a, p.37).

There are valid and fundamental critiques of critical social work in the modernist tradition which for me come back to the modernist based assumptions and understandings contained therein. One further restriction of a modernist approach to critical social work

is that it does not embrace spiritual knowledge. The following section will consider this limitation.

Modernist thought & spiritual knowledge

Modernist thought and spirituality tend to be incompatible on epistemological grounds. The former sees spiritual knowledge as “epistemically empty, or not providing any form of valid knowledge” (Ferrer, 2002, p.17). This is because modernity is dismissive of “non-objective forms of knowledge”, into which category spiritual knowledge falls (Ife, 1997, p.90). As a result of this modernity provides a rather “restrictive understanding of the human condition” (Ife, 1997, p.90). This reductionism within modernist thought means that spiritual and religious understandings are “automatically relegated to the individual subjective world and invariably regarded as not meeting the standards of valid, objective knowledge characteristic of natural science (e.g. public nature of observation, repeatability, verifiability etc.)” (Ferrer, 2002, p.17).

The dualistic characteristics of modernity lead to the division of the spiritual from the socio-political (Ferrer, 2002) which is in contrast to many people’s spiritual understandings. Rothberg’s (1993) examination of socially engaged spirituality and Lerner’s (2000) discussion of the interaction between socio-political forces and people’s spiritual understandings are examples. The complexity of spirituality cannot be represented in this way (Ferrer, 2002). Many spiritual understandings hold seemingly contradictory positions that occur simultaneously, beliefs that would be divided by modernists. The idea, for example, of spirituality as external and connected to other people, the environment or the universe can be held alongside the view of spirituality as an internal personal and private experience. Another example is that within spiritual understandings certainty in an afterlife or in a deity can be held with an uncertainty or mystery regarding the unknown aspects of life and the universe. As argued above, dualist understandings of spirituality often formed under modernist assumptions, limit the breadth and depth of spiritual understanding.

In trying to examine spiritual issues from a modernist understanding spirituality becomes categorised and labelled. Spiritual development models divide and label people's spirituality in accordance with stages of development (Lindsay, 2002). The "modernist structures, and their generalist 'models'", labels and categories (Lane, 1999, p.147) have the tendency to place prescriptive understandings on people's spiritual knowledge, thereby, limiting spiritual diversity and restricting spiritual knowledge. Overall, modernists' understanding of knowledge and their reliance on dualism, categories and labels cause their ideas to be incompatible with spiritual knowledge.

Conclusion

Critical social work in the modernist tradition is not able to adequately embrace spiritual knowledge. It is embedded with modernist assumptions, and the epistemological foundation of modernism excludes and restricts spiritual knowledge. Therefore, postmodern forms of critical social work will be explored for their capacity to engage with spiritual issues in social work.

CHAPTER FIVE – CRITICAL POSTMODERN SOCIAL WORK

This chapter is focused on a detailed examination of critical postmodern social work theory. It lays the foundations for the following chapter, in which I explore the capacity of critical postmodern social work theories to embrace spirituality.

Postmodernism

Postmodernism refers to both a cultural or social phenomenon, and also a body of thought containing multiple theories. In this thesis I refer to postmodernism as a body of thought within social theory. In exploring postmodern thought and theories it is difficult to do justice to their complexity and diversity. One of the reasons for this difficulty is that postmodern theories can encompass “contradictory radical, apolitical, and conservative (if not reactionary) tendencies” (Alway, 1995, p. 136). There are various postmodern theories and the intention of this section is not to conduct an in-depth analysis but to simply gain to a broad understanding of postmodern theories.

Postmodern theories can be characterised as providing “*a new way of thinking about thinking*”, as they challenge “our process of *deriving* explanations” (Fook & Pease, 1999, p.228). Questioning fundamental assumptions regarding what constitutes ‘truth’ and ‘reality’ is a primary goal of postmodern theorists. The assumption that there is a singular, explicit reality is called into question by postmodernists (Klages, 2007). Postmodernists contend that there are multiple realities and that these multiple “realities are constantly being defined and redefined by different actors in different contexts” (Ife, 1997, p.85). These realities are seen as mediated through, defined, and redefined by context (e.g. social, cultural and historical contexts) and by language.

The importance of language is a key theme in most postmodern theories. This is because language is seen as playing a pivotal role in shaping, as opposed to representing, realities (Klages, 2007). Within postmodern theory truth is seen as a product of language rather than reality (Best & Kellner, 1991). What we claim to be ‘truth’ and ‘reality’ is in fact constructed through language as well as social, cultural and historical contexts. For

example, the ways in which concepts like gender are discussed and written about shapes the meaning of these concepts (Lemke, 2007). People's subjectivities, the way they see themselves in relation to the world, are also seen as linguistically and socially constructed (Best & Kellner, 1991). For example, the cultural, social, and historical contexts that inform understandings of gender, and the language used to discuss gender issues influences women's views of themselves in relation to the world.

Within postmodern understandings 'reality' and 'truth' are viewed as constructed; therefore this confronts the idea that there is an objective 'truth' about the nature of reality to be found 'out there'. Postmodernists challenge the belief that people stand outside of these social influences and have an 'objective' unbiased access to truth and knowledge (Hartsock, 1996). Postmodernists are suspicious of claims to knowledge, particularly universal claims (Hartsock, 1996). Postmodern understandings focus on multiple truths and diverse knowledge, and critique universal claims to knowledge (Lemke, 2007).

Postmodern thought also "requires a greater acceptance of uncertainty, ambiguity, paradox and contradictions" (Ife, 1997, p.89). With a view of reality as shifting, being defined and redefined, and 'truth' and knowledge being open to multiple interpretations, uncertainty is very much part of postmodern theories. This uncertainty extends to postmodern understandings of history, which rejects the modernist assumption of history as a process geared towards progress. Under postmodernism, history is no longer seen as occurring in a linear pattern moving towards one ultimate goal. Rather, postmodernists tend to see a number of human histories occurring across different contexts, being continually altered and refashioned with no one purpose or a particular destination.

Criticisms of postmodernism

Having described postmodern understandings broadly, there is a need to acknowledge that there are a variety of postmodern writers and theorists with radically different approaches and uses of postmodern thought (Kaplan, 1988). As Best and Kellner explain, postmodern approaches can be:

“employed for quite different theoretical and political ends. Postmodern theories can be used to attack or defend modernity, to reconstruct radical politics or to declare their impossibility, to enhance Marxian theory or to denounce it, to bolster feminist critiques or to undermine them” (1991, p.256).

While there are various forms and understandings of postmodernism, two stand out. The first is ‘extreme’ postmodernism, which breaks significantly from modernism and takes relativist stances (Kaplan, 1988). The second form is referred to as progressive postmodernism, or a “postmodernism of resistance” which is informed by radical politics (politics geared towards social transformation) (Best & Kellner, 1991; Lane, 1999, p.137). It does not abandon modernity altogether and uses postmodern ideas to resist social oppression (Kaplan, 1988; Best & Kellner, 1991).

The first form of postmodern theory has been described as conservative, as it can be “abstract and subversive of theoretical and political projects that remain valuable” (Best & Kellner, 1991, p.257). Some conservative types of postmodernism, abstract or ‘non-political’ forms, have been said to undermine radical politics by diverting attention away from critical political issues, and thus inadvertently supporting the *status quo* by not adopting a critical view of domination (Best & Kellner, 1991; Fook, 2002).

However, there are criticisms of both the conservative and progressive types of postmodern thought, and the stances in between. For example, the more progressive form of postmodernism has been criticised for its contradictory nature (Robbins, Chatterjee & Canda, 1998). This is particularly so in regards to its view of the individual as shaping society and being simultaneously shaped by society. Some authors, such as Robbins, Chatterjee and Canda (1998), argue that this seems to “set forth a paradoxical and ultimately implausible view of the human self as both radically determined by historical influences and yet radically free to reinterpret itself and social reality as it wishes for its own self-invented purposes” (p.306). However other writers, such as Best and Kellner

(1991), claim that more progressive forms of postmodernism emphasise the capacity of people to be 'historical actors', to play a part in shaping and challenging their historical circumstances, at the same time as considering the fundamental role of history and society in shaping the individual. Progressive forms of postmodernism are multi-layered, and hold that within society, people are able to and capable of constructing "positions of resistance", and hopefully, from these positions, recreate themselves and change their circumstances (Pease & Fook, 1999, p.13).

Some progressive forms of postmodernism are also challenged for offering "little in the way of alternatives to address social injustices" (Allan, 2003a, p.38). Postmodernists are said to be unable to provide "unambiguous or consistent frameworks for understanding the world, much less blueprints for how to go about changing it" (Alway, 1995, p.136). However, Lane argues that while "postmodernists are wary of building blueprints for action, this does not necessarily rule out the possibility of pursuing social justice" (1999, p.137). Progressive postmodern theorists have also been critiqued for tending to "ignore the more systemic features and relations of social structures" (Best & Kellner, 1991, p.259). Some argue that postmodernism's focus on local politics indicates an inability to deal with structural factors. Responding to the financial hardships of an individual in poverty is an example of focusing on the local political level. Not considering the current economic systems in place, contributing to such poverty would be overlooking the structural level of politics. However, it is possible for progressive postmodern theorists to examine how local levels of politics are influenced by and can influence structural factors.

Another critique of postmodern theorists is in relation to their understandings of universality and certainty. Some postmodern approaches that retreat from understandings of certainty and universality have been charged with "retreating from universal notions of social justice, equity and structural change" (Allan, 2003a, p.37). Particularly, more conservative postmodern theorists have been criticised for critiquing all forms of universal vision or knowledge, such as those relating to human rights and social justice, and for uncritically accepting relativism to the point of nihilism (Lemke, 2007). There are

dangers that an uncritical relativist position within postmodern thought will undermine understandings of social justice and human rights. For example, under postmodernism there can be “relativist constructions of human rights, and a corresponding erosion of the idea of human rights being fundamental to all people regardless of culture, nationality, gender, race or whatever” (Ife, 1999, p.216).

However, conservative or relativist postmodern theorists have in contrast been critiqued for unintentionally forming a type of ‘universal postmodernism’, where diversity and fragmentation is universal (Robbins, Chatterjee & Canda, 1998). It has been argued that postmodernists are “dogmatically closed to competing perspectives” and exclude understandings that counter postmodernism (Best & Kellner, 1991, p.263). Therefore, postmodernists have been critiqued for both their denial of and their use of universalism.

The use of dense, obscure and inaccessible language is another point of critique of postmodernists. For me, this is a pervading problem in both reading postmodern literature and writing about postmodern ideas. It is an important and valid criticism that needs to be addressed, especially as most postmodern writers emphasise the way in which language constructs reality and reproduces and reinforces power relations. Particularly, progressive postmodernist writers that seek social transformation should consider the use of language in their writings, as this can reinforce and create dominant power relations within work intended to challenge these relations.

Critical social work & postmodernism: Different approaches

Alongside the development of postmodernism, writers and theorists have considered the use of “postmodern insights to reconstruct critical social theory and radical politics” (Best & Kellner, 1991, p.257). Particularly critical theorists have considered the benefits and limitations of combining progressive postmodern theories and critical theories in the modernist tradition (Best & Kellner, 1991). More progressive forms of postmodernism, which do not wholly dismiss modernity, are commonly viewed as being more compatible with the understandings forming the basis of critical theory. However, most writers who attempt to form a partnership between critical theory in the modernist tradition and more

progressive postmodern theories recognise that there will not be a “harmonious merge of positions” (Best & Kellner, 1991, p.298). While, there are benefits in considering what these positions have to offer each other there are tensions and contradictions inherent in this combination. Best and Kellner (1991) argue that these tensions are not necessarily hindering their interaction, but rather “critical theory and postmodern theory need to be confronted and articulated in their disparities so that their very tensions and differences provoke new thinking and new theoretical and political practice...their differences and opposites could be fruitful” (p.298).

Critical social work theorists have also considered the insights postmodern thought can contribute. Particularly as mentioned in chapter one “emancipatory politics in critical theory has...been rethought by many critical theorists in light of postmodernism” (Pease, Allan & Briskman, 2003, p.3). Critical social work writers, as well as other critical writers (for example writers on liberation theology and some feminist writers), have contemplated the use of postmodern thinking in the quest for emancipation (Always, 1995; Batstone, Mendieta, Lorentzen & Hopkins, 1997; Pease, Allan & Briskman, 2003). However, within critical social work, like in other critical theories and approaches, there is no unified agreement that postmodernism should be included. There are also questions about how one would go about forming a relationship between more progressive postmodern thought and critical theory in the modernist tradition.

Some critical social work theorists, such as Ife, believe that critical theory, which is predominantly grounded in modernist thinking, should include an incorporation of “what is useful and progressive in postmodernism” (Fook & Pease, 1999, p.227; Ife, 1999). Ife (1999) draws on select postmodern ideas to inform a critical social work approach primarily grounded in modernist foundations. In contrast, other theorists such as Pease and Fook (1999), Fook (2002) and Allan, Pease and Briskman (2003) contend that we need to link “progressive postmodern thinking with critical perspectives, to formulate a postmodern critical approach, transforming both postmodern theory and critical theory in the process” (Fook & Pease, 1999, p.227). These theorists suggest that a critical postmodern approach to social work should be informed by both modernist critical theory

and postmodern approaches (Fook & Pease, 1999). This is the critical postmodern social work approach I am using in this thesis, as it does not give preference to either modernist critical theory or postmodernism. The following sections will examine some of the themes, tensions and benefits involved.

Themes & ideas in critical postmodern social work

Common themes within both progressive forms of postmodern thinking and critical theory in the modernist traditions is a critique of the status quo (Best & Kellner, 1991), and an acknowledgement of the “potential of language as the basis for critique and action” (Best & Kellner, 1991, p.246-54, cited in Lane, 1999). Similar themes also include the recognition of “interactive and reflective ways of knowing” and a consideration of “the connection between structural domination and personal self-limitations” (Fook, 2002, p.17).

However, there are distinct differences between critical theorists in the modernist tradition and the progressive postmodernist tradition, particularly in their approaches to emancipation. But despite the differences at play critical postmodern social work theory, as outlined by Fook and Pease (1998), is informed by both postmodernists’ and critical theorists’ engagement with emancipation. Power, discourse, and categories/labels are three main areas which will be explored in order to comprehend what constitutes a critical postmodern social work approach.

Power

Modernist critical theorists and progressive postmodernists hold different understandings of power. Critical theorists, based in modernist thought, conceptualise power as something that is held by the dominant groups in society over those who are oppressed. Therefore, power is seen as “a possession, empowerment as power shifting from the powerless to the powerful” (Parker, Fook & Pease, 1999, p.155). Critical social work in this tradition is preoccupied with superstructure or overarching hierarchies of oppression, emphasising power relations occurring from the top-down.

Progressive postmodern perspectives tend to adopt a more Foucauldian understanding of power. From this perspective power is everywhere and it is “both a productive and a negative force” (Said, 1986; Smart, 1986; Healy, 2001, p.8). Power does not just consist of oppressive relations, there is also the power of resistance (Taylor, 1986). This creates “opportunities for the individual to resist and to be other than a victim...” (Pease, Allan & Briskman, 2003, p.7). This understanding of power as both repressive and productive means power can be exercised against dominant groups (resistance), and it can also be used to support and reproduce dominant power relations. So, potentially power may be used to “empower the more powerful, as well as the less powerful groups” (Parker, Fook & Pease, 1999, p.154).

That power is viewed by progressive postmodernists as occurring not just at a structural level but at many different levels and in many different forms, does not lead to a denial of current oppressive social structures, but rather a belief that local levels of power influence and interact with power relations and structures. This allows for emancipation to be a project undertaken at many points and in many forms. The benefit of a postmodern understanding of power for critical social work is that it “allows a refocusing on the personal and individual” political struggles (Fook & Pease, 1999, p.228) with postmodernists believing that politics is “continuously constructed in the ongoing, face-to-face interactions of people engaged in determining the contours and dynamics of their own lives” (Alway, 1995, p.136). Examining how local positions can resist and reproduce structural oppression allows for a consideration of how people participate in, and can challenge, oppression.

Further, postmodernists view power as intangible, as Foucault argues power is exercised, so “power...is not possessed as a thing, or transferred as a property...” (Foucault, 2000, p.99). As Healy (2000) articulates power is “something that operates through rather than upon individuals” (p.45). Empowerment is harder and more complex because power is seen as localised, shifting and occurring through individuals. A main difficulty in using a postmodern concept of power is that emancipation or empowerment through social

transformation is no longer focused on shifting power from the powerful to the powerless. So, the idea of a radical structural change, with a radical shift in power is seen as less possible. However, there are more possibilities for resistance because there are “multiple forms and sites of struggle” (Alway, 1995, p.136).

A critical postmodern approach to social work attempts to have a more modernist structural analysis of power alongside a postmodernist understanding of power as repressive, productive, shifting and localised. So, critical postmodern approaches to social work carry the belief that power and “political struggles must take place on all different levels” (Fook & Pease, 1999, p.228).

Discourses

Another contribution of postmodernism is the concept of discourse. Discourses are “structures of knowledge claims and practices through which we understand, explain and decide things” (Healy, 2000, p.39). Discourses or languages are said to shape reality, that “by fixing norms and truths, discourses shape what can be written, said and even thought within a particular context” (Healy, 2000, p.39). From within this viewpoint postmodernists tend to hold the opinion that “there is no reality outside of discourse” or language (Healy, 2000, p.39). However, critical postmodern social work perspectives view oppression as occurring through discourses but also occurring at a material level (Pease & Fook, 1999). Conversely while there is a material reality to oppression, experiences of oppression and disadvantage are also shaped by discourses (Healy, 2000). The concept of discourse provides different understandings and different methods of challenging oppressive power relations.

However, the concept of discourse is used differently by different social work approaches. For example ‘constructive social work’ draws on postmodern ideas of discourse, language and narrative, without a political focus or power analysis (Parton & O’Byrne, 2000; Allan, 2003a). Critical postmodern social work theories on the other hand, embrace a political and power analysis. They also examine discourses as a means of challenging oppression.

Alongside a consideration of material oppression, there is a significant emphasis placed on discourses and language in critical postmodern social work. This approach contains the belief that “different language and terminology shape the very definition of people’s experiences and the action taken” (Allan, 2003b, p.60). For example, within language there is the construction of categories of ‘normal’ and ‘abnormal’, which can influence people’s definitions of their experiences. Discourses and language have also been described as the site where “social and political consequences are defined and contested...[they are] also the place where our sense of ourselves, or subjectivities, is constructed” (Jessup & Rogerson, 1999, p.163). As such critical postmodern approaches to social work tend to emphasise the importance of discourse analysis, seeing this as a “powerful strategy for change” (Jessup & Rogerson, 1999, p.163).

Discourse analysis involves analysing and highlighting “the processes through which discourses constitute and constrain social relationships” (Healy, 2000, p.67). Discourse analysis in critical postmodern social work practice is mainly used as a way of challenging oppression. The intention of discourse analysis is to reveal the politics in language and discourses and reveal and challenge social control, for example by challenging normalised and constructed social identities. Discourse analysis also aims to alter subjectivities by calling into question the way people see themselves in relation to the world, and negotiate social change.

Discourse analysis is mainly seen as a tool to enable changed subjectivity and to assist the capacity of individuals and groups to negotiate social change by both identifying and challenging dominant discourses. While there are many type of discourses (such as discourses of resistance), dominant discourses “involve processes of domination whereby the oppressed often collude with the oppressor, taking for granted their discourse and their definition of the situation” (Pease & Fook, 1999, p.14). So dominant discourses contributing to dominant power relations, can be challenged through discourse analysis.

Critical postmodern social work theory provides a more complex, less fixed understanding of power, with an emphasis on people's capacity to challenge discourses of oppression and construct discourses of resistance. The focus on discourses through critical postmodern social work perspectives allow disadvantaged individuals and groups to be seen as having the ability to negotiate social and individual change, rather than being just passively constructed by ideas and structures.

Categories & labels

One of the critiques of critical social work in a modernist tradition, for which postmodern approaches offer an alternative, is the use of categories and labels. Modernists are often characterised by their use of labels and categories attributed partially to the dualist thinking embedded in modernist thought. As explained in the previous chapter dualist thinking involves the creation of binary oppositional categories (Healy, 2000). For example, categories of man/woman, normal/abnormal, powerful/powerless, public/private, thought/action, and white/black. Healy (2000) contends that modernist truth claims are heavily based in dualist categorisation, that in "modern discourses, truth is made possible only through oppositions or contrasts such as the following: man not woman; presence not absence..." (Healy, 2000, p.42). As well as being related to modernist truth claims dualist categories can contribute to the construct of unequal power relations. Dualist categories are often fixed and hierarchical, with one category being privileged over the other, causing the 'other' category to be devalued (Healy, 2000; Fook, 2002). These categories are also presented as being mutually exclusive, with experiences and understandings that fit in both or neither categories being marginalised (Healy, 2000; Fook, 2002). Dualist categories "do not allow for a wealth of diverse meaning, experiences and identities to be represented..." (Fook, 2002, p.13).

Dualist categorisation and labelling are particularly a problem in relation to identity. Identity politics, and corresponding movements such as the feminist movement emerged in the 1970's (Pease, Allan & Briskman, 2003). Identity politics is "based upon the idea that all members of the same oppressed group share a common identity defined by criteria of ethnicity, religion, gender or sexual orientation" (Pease, Allan, & Briskman,

2003, p.5). It allowed different perspectives, not just white, male and middle class perspectives, to be represented. However, identity categories, which form the primary bases of critical social work in the modernist tradition, have been critiqued on many levels.

Firstly, identity categories tend to overlook diversity, “to define people simply in terms of structural categorisations seems to deny the rich variety of backgrounds, experiences and changes...” (Fook, 2002, p.74). For example, some women of non-white backgrounds find that the category of gender is understood in terms of what it means to be a white woman, with other understandings being overlooked. Secondly, contextual or localised understandings of identity are not taken into consideration. Fook (2002) argues, “identities and people’s own perspectives must be interpreted in the light of changing and specific situations in which they are located” (p.74). Furthermore, identity categories, such as class, are often marginalised and presented as fixed:

“locking people into fixed identity categories can also have the effect of fixing power or powerlessness to these categorisations. Therefore marginal groups who are defined by a powerless identity are effectively disempowered through the assignation of this label” (Fook, 2002, p.74).

Another point of criticism is that while identity categories such as gender or race “might still have meaning” for people, to view people’s identity as contained within these labels and categories is a form of reductionism (Fook, 2002, p.75). It tends to reduce people to a singular identity for example woman. Even when taking count of more than one identity, for example black woman, this still fails to depict the complexity and contradiction within identity.

Postmodern approaches hold the idea of there being multi-selves or many different identities and subjectivities that can change, and hold contradictions (Fook, 2002). This allows for a more complex examination of identity, freeing us from a binary understanding of identity (Kaplan, 1988). For example, taking into account that people

can be both the oppressor and the oppressed, a person from a non-white background can discriminate against other people from non-white backgrounds.

For me, the idea of multiple identities and subjectivities that are contradictory can also assist in understanding internalised oppression. Internalised oppression involves disadvantaged individuals or groups carrying with them “the dominant group’s stereotyped and inferiorized images” of themselves (Mullaly, 2002, p.65). Internalised oppression can cause “some oppressed people to act in ways that affirm the dominant group’s view of them as inferior and, consequently, leads to a process of inferiorized persons reproducing their own oppression” (Mullaly, 2002, p.65). Forming ones identity partially by drawing on an understanding of self as inferior or lesser is contradictory to ones own self-interest. Also, identities will be influenced by internalised oppression as well as more positive understandings simultaneously despite the contradictions. Internalised oppression is not a passive process and individuals can struggle with and challenge inferior understandings of themselves as they grow, change and learn.

As well as a diverse and complex understanding of identity, postmodernism also offers deconstruction as a way of breaking down dualistic categories and labels of thought and identity. Deconstruction is a process which involves uncovering “hidden, contextual or marginalised and multiple other meanings”, it also “*decentres* (i.e. upsets) dominant thinking” (Fook, 2002, p.13). Deconstruction can be used to uncover “the binary oppositions through which social reality is understood” (Healy, 2000, p.42), to expose and break down dualist thinking and the categories that accompany it, in order to make way for new understandings.

Overall postmodern writers offer an important analysis of the way in which dualist thinking is used to establish truth claims and the way categories and labels can be used to support power inequalities by marginalizing understandings which do not fit into these categories or which fall into non-privileged categories. Postmodern thinking also can provide an examination of how identity categories fix people into categories of powerless, and how this can serve to further disempower people. Alternatively,

postmodernism offers deconstruction as a way of challenging the use of labels and categories and provide a more complex, diverse and multiple understanding of identity and therefore oppression.

However, some postmodern understandings can completely deconstruct the identity categories of, for example, gender, race, class and sexuality. Critical postmodern social work incorporates the postmodern criticisms of the use of categories and labels, but holds that the identity categories of, for example, gender, race, or class, may still have meaning for people, but that the diversity of these meanings should be considered. This stance has lead to insight, as well as difficulties in regards to representation.

The problem of acknowledging a diversity of experiences and identities is that one voice or one representation of issues and experiences makes political change more viable. Multiple voices and representations of issues tend to divide attention and can lead to a fragmentation of more 'macro' political causes. Solidarity, the similarities that unify people or cause them to come together, provides a strong base for political change (for example the use of solidarity in the women's movement and the black civil rights movement of the 1960/1970's).

Critical postmodern social work theorists acknowledge that there are "political costs [to] embracing difference and uncertainty" as both solidarity and "certainty provides a powerful base from which to challenge the truths of dominant groups" and to take political action (Allan, 2003a, p.44). However, this is not to say that diversity and solidarity should be seen as diametrically opposed or placed in binary categories. For example, two people with different backgrounds and experiences of womanhood may both find similar themes within their differences, or they might find similarity in how both their life stories contrast from the dominant story or understanding of what it means to be a woman. Difference cannot be ignored if it risks oppression, in order to ensure solidarity, however, difference cannot be so completely embraced that similarities are overlooked. I believe there is a point where difference and solidarity can come together, but this is not to say that there are not still some tensions and contradictions between

diversity and solidarity. In critical postmodern social work these tensions and contradictions are recognised, negotiated and worked with (Allan, 2003a; Allan, 2003b). As Lane (1999) summarises:

“resistance, uncertainty and difference with justice – a tricky, but not impossible, combination for postmodern times” (p.147).

Creativity & contradictions in critical postmodern social work

There are apparent tensions and contradictions present in the combination of postmodernism and modernist critical theory within social work. Postmodern and modernist critical theories differ on some main factors. For example, postmodernism tends to focus on theorising, with modernist critical theory more grounded in practice (Ife, 1999). Postmodernism is concentrated more on local politics and modernist critical theory is concerned with larger social structures. While, modernist critical theory points out similarities between oppressed groups, postmodernism focuses on difference and diversity.

However, I believe these differences and tensions could actually be beneficial for the inclusion of spirituality. From a postmodernist perspective “the tensions and paradoxes [are]...likely points for the development of an alternative discourse” (Ife, 1997, p.90). A dialectical perspective within modernist critical theory also contends that it is from “the tensions between...apparent contradictions that creative change can emerge” (Ife, 1999, p.221). Best and Kellner (1991) suggest that the differences between modernist critical theory and postmodernism (progressive) could be “fruitful” (p.298). Therefore, indicating that points of difference could be sites of creativity.

In critical postmodern social work there is an attempt to hold differences together, particularly in the type of postmodern critical social work outlined by Pease and Fook (1999) and Allan, Pease and Briskman (2003) and discussed in this previous section. This approach to critical postmodern social work involves an attempt to have a mutual interaction between critical theory and postmodernism. This involves discarding the

modernist understanding of either/or. By working with differences instead of dividing them, tensions result, tensions that can cause creative change as well as leave a lot of unanswered questions. For example, critical theory holds universal understandings of human rights and social justice, while, some progressive forms of postmodernism hold that understandings of social justice and human rights are influenced by people's historical, social and cultural context. By holding these points together the conclusion that can be drawn is that there are some universal notions of human rights and social justice (for example the right to live free from torture), while some other ideas of human rights and social justice vary from context to context. This leads to questions such as who gets to decide which notions of human rights and social justice are universal and on what basis?

Critical postmodern approaches to social work could be called works in progress. Critical postmodern social work theory and practice can never be viewed as 'resolved' or 'completed' because the context is always changing and filled with diversity. As well as contributing to social work understandings such as understandings of power, critical postmodern approaches offer a critical view and encourage reflection and continual questioning, particularly in regards to its own theories and practices. The reflexivity, tensions and contradictions that emerge from a critical postmodern approach to social work, I believe, make it unique. It does not just offer a critique of postmodernism or a critique of modernist critical theory, but the attempt to combine the two creates an alternative discourse, which raises new questions and important considerations for social work and its engagement with issues of oppression and emancipation.

Conclusion

Postmodern theories provide us with a new way of thinking about knowledge, and can challenge our very understandings of reality and truth. These theories can be used conservatively but can also be used for more progressive aims. When postmodern and critical theories are combined they can provide us with innovative ways of challenging injustices and viewing power relations. However, the combination of these theories is not a simple process as there are inherent tensions and contradictions between these theories.

But it is from these tensions and contradictions that creative change and new ideas can emerge. This paves the way for new ways of thinking about social work and spirituality.

CHAPTER SIX – CRITICAL POSTMODERN SOCIAL WORK & SPIRITUALITY

The previous chapter focused on the nature of critical postmodern social work theory, its potential for creativity and its focus on the construction of knowledge. This chapter considers the capacity of critical postmodern social work theory to engage with spiritual ways of knowing. As discussed previously in this thesis, spiritual ‘ways of knowing’ refer to or encompasses “a multidimensional access to reality that includes not only intellectual knowing of the mind, but also the emotional and emphatic knowing of the heart, the sensual and somatic knowing of the body, the visionary and intuitive knowing of the soul, as well as any other way of knowing available to human beings” (Ferrer, 2002, p.121).

Critical postmodern social work & spirituality

As mentioned previously, Ife (1997) is one author who considers spirituality within critical postmodern social work theory. His work however, does not focus on the connection between postmodern understandings and spiritual understandings or ways of knowing. Wong (2004), writing about spirituality and social work education, does provide this connection. As other authors have pointed out postmodern theories are unique because they are not just another body of knowledge, rather they challenge the way we know and what is considered knowledge (Fook, 2002). Critical postmodern social work theory then, should challenge “the very fundamental way of how we know” (Wong, 2004, p.8). Wong (2004) argues that currently critical postmodern social work theory does not challenge this but rather it tends to accept that dominant understandings of knowledge and knowing are formed through “the conceptual and cognitive processes of learning and reflection” (Wong, 2004, p.1). It is at this cognitive level that critical social work education engages with students (Wong, 2004). Wong (2004) suggests that the focus on cognitive and conceptual ways of knowing forms a “‘discursive rationality’ which privileges the mind”, and “neglect[s] bodily, emotive and spiritual knowing” (p. 3 & p.1). She proposes the practice of mindfulness, which “is about being here, fully present with all our activities and thoughts, with body and mind united...”, as a method

of freeing “ourselves from the constraints of the conceptual mind...” (Wong, 2004, p.5 & 6).

An important point made by Wong is that the emphasis within critical postmodern social work on diversity and a commitment to justice, “demands us to recognize...the many different ways we know, through our mind-intellect as well as through our bodily, emotive and spiritual experiences” (Wong, 2004, p.8). Critical postmodern social work should have an “openness to alternative knowledge” and should “honour marginalized knowledges”, which includes spiritual knowledge (Wong, 2004, p.8). Wong examines what constitutes knowledge, and how in critical postmodern social work spiritual knowing as well as other forms of knowing, are marginalised. This is a crucial point because approaches to social work like critical postmodern, that focus on how knowledge is constructed and are dedicated to disrupting dominant ways of thinking, can still privilege certain concepts and ideas and neglect other ways of knowing (Wong, 2004).

Ways of knowing

Critical postmodern social work authors challenge the idea that only “rational thought is the precursor to effective change strategies” (Healy, 2000, p.52), and argue that the “rationalist understanding of experience (that awareness will lead to action)” is simplistic (Fook, 2002, p.61). Thinking that racism is wrong does not stop people acting in a racist manner. Fook gives another example; that being “aware that acting empathically may work against you does not mean you can immediately change your behaviour” (Fook, 2002, p.61). This understanding is important, especially given the significant place irrationality occupies in the area of oppression. For example, irrational fear and hatred is often central to racism, therefore using rationality and logic alone to combat it is difficult. Healy (2000) also points out that “the emphasis on rationality can neglect other ways of knowing such as bodily and emotive knowledge” (p.52). Healy (2000) applies this critique to the rational process of consciousness-raising, which is central to modernist critical social work, stating that this process tends to “ignore the plethora of ways in which bodily and irrational or emotional knowledge impede change or make it possible” (p.52).

Postmodernism questions “not just what we know, but also how we know it” (Fook, 2002, p.33). Fook (2002) describes postmodern theories as concerned with:

“how and why we search for underlying causes or explanations, rather than what those causes might be, and whether one explanation is more accurate or better than another. In some ways they are theories of knowledge (epistemologies), rather than theories of being (ontologies). They are about different sorts of concerns. Yet on the other hand, ‘knowing’ is an integral part of ‘being’, so it is important to understand how what we know affects how we act and practice” (p.33).

This description is significant as it highlights postmodernism’s concern with knowledge. Both postmodernists as well as critical thinkers, ask “what constitutes ‘acceptable’ knowledge, and whether and why some forms of knowledge are valued over others” (Fook, 2002, p.33). They challenge what constitutes ‘acceptable’ or ‘legitimate’ knowledge, and postmodernism also focuses on different or marginalised ways of knowing, and considers new ways of knowing and learning (Fook, 2002). Critical postmodern social work theories involve “a recognition of different ways of knowing” because postmodernism provides more “complex ways of appreciating knowledge and its creation” (Fook, 2002, p.44). So, critical postmodern social work perspectives should be concerned with how knowledge is created, honouring of different or marginalised knowledge and receptive to complex ways of knowing. But alternative ways of knowing, such as spiritual ways of knowing, are not embraced within critical postmodern social work perspectives.

Critical postmodern social work theorists, through their critique of the rational and acknowledgment of other ways of knowing and understanding, have come to consider the connection between emotional and bodily knowledge and oppression. An acknowledgement of bodily knowing for example has allowed for an understanding that “‘people’s physical bodies and their subjectivities are fused inextricably together’”, and

that “physical appearance carries social connotations, and has a role in defining our social place and identity” (Fook, 2002, p.77). As well as forming a link between our bodies and subjectivities, ‘bodily knowledge’ allows further consideration of social control. So women lose weight to conform to dominant understandings of what a woman should be. The body then is understood to be a site of oppression as well as having the capacity to also be a site of emancipation.

Theoretically, these emotional and bodily ways of knowing are acknowledged in critical postmodern social work, challenging the dominance of mind-intelligent or rational ways of knowing, and highlighting other ways of understanding emancipation and oppression. I agree with Wong’s argument that even in postmodern critical social work the emphasis is on “conceptual and cognitive processes of learning and reflection” (Wong, 2004, p.1). The important practice of self-reflectivity is an example since it tends to be primarily based on thoughts about experiences or feelings. Wong (2004) argues for a broader, more holistic, learning through “the body, emotions and spirit” (p.1).

The process of looking at ‘how we know’ in different ways prompts different thinking about how oppression is known and resisted in different ways. An important challenge for critical postmodern social work theorist is to consider how spiritual ways of knowing can prompt different thinking about how oppression is known and resisted.

Connecting ways of knowing

Since this thesis is focused on spirituality a critique of the dominance of rationality as a basis for understanding and challenging oppression is important, however this is not to dismiss rationality. I believe there is a need for an “integration” between mind-intellect or rationality, bodily, emotional and spiritual ways of knowing (Wong, 2004, p.1). I do not believe that intelligence-mind and spirituality should be seen as dichotomous opposites. Similarly I do not believe that bodily understandings can be separated from emotional understandings but rather that these four factors and ways of knowing are interconnected and can be considered together. Spiritual ways of knowing are just one of many ways of knowing the world.

In the following sections I will discuss postmodern spirituality and the capacity of critical postmodern social work theory to embrace an understanding of spirituality in social work.

Postmodern spirituality

Postmodern spirituality is a very diverse term. Some people refer to postmodern spirituality as spiritual and religious beliefs and practices in a postmodern 'era' (Astell, 1994). Others refer to postmodern spirituality as a particular spiritual perspective that holds beliefs that are characteristically postmodern (Astell, 1994). For example some say 'New Age' spirituality is a postmodern spirituality as it is characterised by diversity and plurality (Astell, 1994). A few authors have engaged postmodern thought to inform religious and spiritual understandings, and have also used spiritual and religious perspectives to inform and expand postmodern thought (for example Astell, 1994). It is this attempted connection between spirituality and postmodern thought that I am referring to as postmodern spirituality in my thesis. It is an approach to understanding spiritual issues by using postmodern thought rather than a particular type or form of spirituality. Some writers of postmodern spirituality are concerned with "illuminating the striking affinity between the most innovative aspects of postmodern thought and religious or mystical discourse" (Astell, 1994, p.14). My goal is to examine similarities and differences between some types of postmodern thought and spiritual issues or ways of knowing.

Astell (1994) argues that postmodern thought affects the way we consider spiritual issues. Postmodern views of spiritual issues are said to contain a number of different characteristics, such as a rejection of "the soul/body split...the spiritual [is seen] as embracing and permeating the material" (Lindsay, 2002, p.36). No longer viewing spirituality as solely immaterial or 'otherworldly' allows for a consideration of how the material affects the spiritual and vice versa. Another characteristic of postmodern spirituality is the belief that spirituality is not just an aspect of a person but is connected to the whole of a person (Lindsay, 2002). This view that spirituality can influence the

whole person is an understanding that could potentially influence social work practice, emphasising the need to include spirituality when attempting to conduct holistic practice.

Postmodern spirituality also allows for a contemplation of spirituality more broadly, because it considers “not only an individual’s sense of personal identity and relationship with other people, but also her/his relationship with the encompassing universe...” (Lindsay, 2002, p.36). This allows us to consider not just a relationship with the self, but with others and the ‘universe’. This could help workers in dealing with clients who have more of a social understanding of spirituality, and therefore connect their spirituality to others.

A postmodern spiritual perspective views spirituality not just as private, but also as public or worldly (Lindsay, 2002), which has its benefits. For example, allowing spirituality to be seen as public and worldly by breaking down the dualism associated with a solely modernist understanding. However postmodern spirituality is in conflict with religion as it focuses on spiritual truths as opposed to spiritual ‘Truth’. This emphasis on multiple perspectives and truths can be positive in that it could prompt spiritual beliefs to be “open to change and to more positive intercultural and interfaith exchanges” (Mitchell, 1994, p.135).

Another point of tension between postmodern approaches to spiritual issues and more mainstream religions, is that many religious beliefs are based on literal interpretations of a text (such as the Bible or the Koran). Postmodernism rejects “literalism” and focuses on the historical and social context of people’s beliefs (Lindsay, 2002, p.25). Astell (1994) argues that this tension between postmodern spirituality and religion is inevitable as “postmodern spirituality in the West inevitably confronts the religious heritage of modernity in its related forms” (p.3). Lindsay (2002) argues that this point of difference is positive as “postmodernity has enriched religious faith by challenging believers to question inappropriate understandings of religious traditions or doctrines” (p.24-25). For example, acknowledging the influence of historical and social context can challenge negative depictions of women and of homosexuality in the Bible, seeing them as a

product of a specific historical and social location. Postmodernism has, however, been criticised for challenging spiritual and religious beliefs to such an extent that people's moral and ethical beliefs, which accompany many religious and spiritual views, become relative and can be rendered meaningless (Lindsay, 2002).

On a more positive note, postmodernism may “encourage spirituality to reject explicitly the individualism that has frequently characterized previous perspectives of spirituality” by emphasising the importance of social relationships (Lindsay, 2002, p.25-26). Particularly, it may have the potential to challenge more psychological approaches which use psychological knowledge to understand spirituality and which are characterised by the “individualization of the spiritual life, [and] application of the ‘scientific’ approach to the spiritual life” (Roten, 1994, p.108)⁷.

While postmodern spirituality can focus on the values and assumptions that shape a person's spirituality (Lindsay, 2002), which is important to acknowledge and recognise, it is also problematic. If a person's spiritual knowledge or spiritual issues are seen as completely constructed by contextual values and assumptions, then the spiritual is not seen as ‘real’. While I believe spirituality is influenced by context, conservative forms of postmodern that wholly reject modernity would view spiritual as totally constructed. *Critical* postmodern social work, which includes some modernist ideas, holds some meanings as ‘real’, as ‘truths’, alongside an appreciation of the influence of context in constructing meaning. In the following section, I will consider if perhaps a *critical* postmodern view is more suited to a consideration of spiritual issues as opposed to postmodern thought alone.

Critical postmodern social work & Spiritual ways of knowing

I believe that critical postmodern social work perspectives, in particular, have a lot to offer spiritual understandings or ways of knowing, and that spiritual understandings or

⁷ An example of a psychological approach to spirituality is transpersonal psychology, referred to in chapter three.

ways of knowing can be compatible with and can contribute to critical postmodern social work.

Modernist worldviews have tended to rely on “objectivity and rationality...to discount feelings, emotion, intuition, religion, magic and spirituality as valid sources of knowledge or forms of experience”, and this marginalizes “other voices and the knowledge they represent” (Ife, 1997, p.90). Postmodern views help “to legitimise forms of knowledge other than those that can be empirically verified” (Ife, 1997, p.90). Some postmodern perspectives can acknowledge spiritual knowledge and issues by moving outside a rationalist construction. *Critical* postmodern understandings, as opposed to using a postmodern approach which excludes modernism entirely, can add a deeper understanding of spirituality. For example, postmodern thinking has been criticized for having “a suspicion of overall frameworks of explanation [which] can easily lead to a detachment from ethical or political responses to suffering in the real world” (Lindsay, 2002, p.25). Critical postmodern social work theories have also dealt with this problem, as postmodernism in its conservative form can be said to lead to a relativism of ethical, moral and political issues.

Critical postmodern social work draws from progressive forms of postmodernism, together with critical theories focused on emancipatory politics. Critical postmodern social work theorists have attempted to address the potential for ethical, moral and political detachment within postmodernism by not abandoning all modernist ‘universal’ understandings (for example in relation to human rights and social justice). This would allow a critical postmodern perspective of spirituality to maintain some political and ethical ground. So, a critical postmodern perspective, as opposed to a postmodernist or critical modernist perspective alone, can be more suited to dealing with spiritual issues.

Modernists assume that “theoretical positions are mutually exclusive, implying that one can have allegiance to only one at a time” (Fook & Pease, 1999, p.228). However, for postmodernists there is no reason why more than one explanation cannot be considered. Authors Fook and Pease (1999) argue that “there is no logical reason why aspects of

postmodern thinking cannot sit easily with other causal theories, since it does not seek to *replace* other explanations, but rather to make observations about our process of *deriving* explanations” (p.228). So, a postmodern perspective can hold more than one position or theory, which can lead to tensions and contradictions between theories and positions. Critical theory has also been said to have the capacity to hold “apparently contradictory opposites: theory and practice, personal and political” (Ife, 1999, p.221). Therefore, critical postmodern social work has the capacity to hold ‘apparently contradictory’ opposites together, and it is “from the tensions between these apparent contradictions that creative change can emerge” (Ife, 1999, p.221). Critical postmodern social work theory is capable of embracing spiritual issues because it can hold complexity, tensions and contradictions together. This allows for a more creative consideration of spiritual issues. There are already some understandings considered contradictory and divided under the dualism of modernity which are held together within people’s spiritual perspectives. Examples are:

- Certainty – uncertainty
- Critical thinking & questioning – faith
- Spirituality as internal (relationship with self) – spirituality as external (relationship with others/world/universe)
- Spirituality as socially & historically constructed – spirituality as transhistorical (beyond history)
- Spirituality as diverse & plural – spirituality as a universal part of humanity

Just as these understandings can be held together in spiritual ways of knowing, in critical postmodern social work approaches they can be held together in tension and dialogue. This is illustrated in liberation theology, a critical theory and a theology, which reflects critically on social inequality alongside maintaining faith (Batstone, Mendieta, Lorentzen & Hopkins, 1997). Feminist spirituality is another example where these understandings are held together. Feminist spirituality holds faith alongside a reflection on “spiritual socialization and God-representations” (Roten, 1994, p.109). Feminist spirituality and liberation theology not only hold together ideas such as faith and critical questioning,

they also consider how they interact; how critical questioning strengthens faith, and how faith motivates critical questioning (Finley, 1991; Batstone, Mendieta, Lorentzen & Hopkins, 1997). I believe critical postmodernism has the ability to hold together the contrasts and tensions that are present in spiritual perspectives and ways of knowing, and is able to consider how these contrasting factors may interact.

Another benefit of the engagement of critical postmodern social work approaches in spiritual issues is that critical postmodernism considers how knowledge is used to perpetuate and reinforce power relations (both power relations of resistance and oppression) and how different forms of knowledge and perspectives are formed within different contexts. To an extent this would allow critical postmodern social work theorists to consider the power relations involved in spirituality knowledge and how people's historical and cultural contexts can shape and influence this knowledge.

From a critical postmodern perspective, spiritual and religious knowledge can be seen as relating to power, and this power can be used for "good and ill" (Anderson & Braud, 1998, p.246). They can be power relations of resistance or oppression (Pease & Fook, 1999). This engagement is vital as spirituality and religion are often represented as otherworldly and therefore disconnected from power struggles. Power struggles are within spiritual and religious knowledge, with people setting up their knowledge to compete with other people's spiritual and religious knowledge. Relations of power in spiritual and religious knowing are important to consider because "already the world history is littered with accounts of the misuse of spiritual and religious authority" (Anderson & Braud, 1998, p.247). I believe that critical postmodern social work theory has the capability to provide a more subtle and complex understanding of spiritual knowing and power relations, recognising both positive and negative uses of power.

Critical postmodern social work approaches could also contribute the concept of discourses to social works' engagement with spiritual issues. Discourse centres on "language, the actual words and the forms in which we use them to communicate", and the way in which language shapes our experiences and constructs labels and categories

(Fook, 2002, p.64-65). Whereas, some postmodernists would argue that there is no meaning outside of language and discourses, critical postmodernists hold that there is a reality outside of language, but that language is influential in shaping our understandings and experiences of reality. A consideration of how discourses create labels and shape experiences is crucial to engagement with spirituality and there is a need, both in and outside of social work, to be aware of the use of labels and different discourses of spirituality at play. For example, language may be used to “impose labels that divide spiritual experiences into two categories: those that are acceptable and ‘sane’ versus those that are pathological or ‘insane’” (Damianakis, 2001, p.23). This labelling and discussion of spirituality and religion in pathological terms does occur in mainstream psychology and psychiatry. For example, as Canda and Furman (1999) point out, in the DSM-IV (American Psychiatric Associations Diagnostic and Statistical Manual IV) there are guidelines in relation to spiritual and religious issues, which use and perpetuate particular understandings and labels. An example is the cross-cultural diagnosis for schizophrenia which states that in ““some cultures, visual or auditory hallucinations with a religious content may be a normal part of religious experience (e.g. seeing the Virgin Mary or hearing God’s voice)’” (Canda & Furman, 1999, p. 241). As Canda and Furman (1999) highlight “visionary experiences that are meaningful to people are still branded as hallucinations” (p.241). Psychological and psychiatric discourses on spirituality and religion are laden with assumptions of normality and pathology.

Mainstream psychology and psychiatry, with the emphasis on scientific and rationalist understandings contain discourses of spiritual pathology and normality. However, these are not the only places in which labels of spirituality and understandings of spiritual normality are perpetuated. The field of social work and spirituality uses models which label people’s spirituality as ‘healthy’, ‘unhealthy’, ‘mature’ and ‘immature’ (e.g. Lovinger, 1996; Bullis, 1999; Lindsay, 2002). There are also other discourses of spirituality, ‘romantic’ discourses, which are often oversimplistic to the extent that conflicting views and differences are ignored, where spirituality is depicted primarily in a positive light, with little or no consideration of how it can be misused (e.g. Cowley, 1993).

A social justice discourse is central to my work and I understand and frame spiritual issues through this. I am aware that my emphasis on theory in discussing spirituality and my use of theoretical language could lead to a 'theorising of spirituality'. This could obscure spiritual experiences and practices by focusing on spirituality in relation to theory thereby causing a dissection of spiritual issues. So, the depth and breadth of spiritual issues and ways of knowing could well be diminished in my language centred on social justice and theory. It is important for me to acknowledge the way in which language and the discussion of a topic can shape particular understandings of the topic and exclude others. Critical postmodern theory allows acknowledgement of this through highlighting the concept of discourse, and the ways in which discussions of spiritual issues can shape people's understandings.

Having acknowledged spiritual discourses such as pathology and normality, 'romantic', and social justice, and that they significantly affect the way spiritual issues are approached, I consider it important to also acknowledge the complex relationship between language and spirituality. While people use language and categories to describe spirituality they are very limited (Kovel, 1991; Canda & Furman, 1999; Coholic, 2001; Lindsay, 2002). There are differing explanations as to why spirituality is difficult to fully capture in language. As mentioned previously in chapter one, language is a difficult means by which to express spirituality because it fails to capture the whole and tends to reduce spirituality to its parts, dissecting spirituality, thereby losing its full meaning (Lerner, 2000). Kovel (1991) suggests that the incapacity of language to capture spirituality fully is "a reminder of the prison house which is language, whose words draw down, delimit, and necessarily narrow the possibilities of being" (p.175).

I believe that while people can and do use language to express and describe spirituality it is difficult to find language that can adequately and fully describe it. Language, especially the written word, tends to narrow, limit and dissect spiritual understandings. For me, the focus is not so much on how can we capture spirituality more fully in words, but why language should be the primary basis by which we describe spirituality. I think

that logical rational ways of thinking suggest that when we wish to describe or explain a phenomenon we use language, particularly written language, to make the phenomena more fixed and definable. Perhaps part of the reason that spirituality is difficult to fully capture in words is because, to an extent, it involves mystery and the unknown. Spiritual ways of knowing are alternative ways of knowing, so they might bring with them alternative ways of expressing, communicating and understanding, which do not involve language. For example, Wong (2004) suggests that by using bodily, emotional and spiritual ways of communicating, reflecting and understanding such as mindfulness and listening in silence, “we are not confined by the conceptual mind and dominant discourses which categorise, normalize and exclude” (p.3). So, spiritual knowing could actually be a positive contributor to critical postmodern social work theory, causing theorists to consider alternative ways of communicating, reflecting and understanding that do not necessarily involve language and discourse. This could be particularly relevant to alternative ways of reflecting on, understanding and experiencing oppression, as well as resisting oppression. Wong’s (2004) illustrates how spiritual ways of knowing can create alternative ways of recognising and challenging dominant discourses. She writes that listening in silence works to challenge the focus on language and categorising through language (Wong, 2004).

As discussed earlier, postmodern theories can be described as “theories of knowing (epistemologies)” because they are concerned with “not just what we know, but also how we know it” (Fook, 2002, p.33). Critical postmodern social work is thus open to new ways of knowing, new ways of “seeing what is knowledge, how it is generated, how it is expressed” (Fook, 2002, p.35). Similarly, spiritual ways of knowing can offer critical postmodern social work alternative ways of knowing and expressing knowledge, and therefore alternative ways of challenging dominant forms of knowledge. Just as critical postmodern social work has come to theoretically acknowledge bodily and emotional knowledge as sites where oppression can be perpetuated and resisted, I propose it is time to consider how spiritual knowledge relates to oppression and emancipation. At the same time I believe that a critical postmodern social work perspective would allow spiritual issues to be grounded in an analysis of power, discourse, historical and social context.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have considered the compatibility of spiritual ways of knowing with critical postmodern social work understandings. They each add value to the other. Spiritual ways of knowing, understanding and expressing are compatible with critical postmodernism's concern with new ways of "seeing what is knowledge, how it is generated, and how it is expressed" (Fook, 2002, p.35). They are also compatible because critical postmodern social work is concerned with honouring marginalised knowledge, and spirituality is a marginalised knowledge. Spiritual knowledge also allows social work theorists in the critical postmodern tradition to consider the limits of language and discourse in expressing, communicating, and reflecting on knowledge. In addition, spiritual knowledge, as an alternative way of knowing, leads to a consideration of alternative ways of experiencing and understanding phenomena such as oppression, which can lead to a consideration of alternative ways of recognising and challenging oppression.

Critical postmodern social work theory also would be useful as a lens to consider spiritual knowledge because it allows for a consideration of how power relates to spiritual knowledge and authority, and it allows for an acknowledgement that power relations within spirituality have the potential to be both oppressive and productive. Critical postmodern social work theory can consider the role of the social and historical context in shaping spiritual and religious values, knowledge and assumptions. It proposes an examination of discourses which can lead to a consideration of spiritual discourses and how they shape people's understandings. Furthermore, the emphasis on diversity and not valuing one 'truth' over another can allow for a dialogue between spiritual perspectives and a respect for diversity.

Critical postmodern social work theorists consider other ways of knowing besides rational ways of knowing, which can pave the way for spiritual ways of knowing. It also can help to break down the dualistic understanding of spirituality associated with modernity. Furthermore, critical postmodern social work theory can move attention away

from solely individualistic focused spirituality, by looking outside of the self to people's connection with others, the environment and the universe. Crucially it can hold 'apparently contradictory opposites' together, such as those embedded in spiritual understandings and ways of knowing, for example certainty and uncertainty. Also, critical postmodern social work theory could be used to deconstruct the dominant discourses that marginalise and de-legitimise spirituality.

Overall, critical postmodern social work theory can open up a space for spiritual ways of knowing within social work. The following chapter consider how this space can be expanded and developed further.

CHAPTER SEVEN – LIBERATION SPIRITUALITY

As outlined in the previous chapter critical postmodern social work theory can open up space for spiritual ways of knowing. Liberation spirituality closely intertwines and connects spirituality and emancipatory politics. This chapter will explore this connection, and consider how liberation spirituality specifically can further assist critical postmodern social work theory to embrace spiritual ways of knowing.

Joel Kovel's liberation spirituality

I have already made reference to Joel Kovel's work earlier in my thesis. Kovel is a psychoanalyst and Marxist who has been influenced by his involvement with "religious pacifism and, especially, liberation theology in Central America" in the 1970's (Kovel, 1991, p.3). He brings these unique perspectives to his book *History & Spirit: An Inquiry into the Philosophy of Liberation* (Kovel, 1991). I will now draw on this particular work, and also on the last few chapters of *The Radical Spirit: Essays on Psychoanalysis & Society* (Kovel, 1988). The latter precedes *History & Spirit*. It discusses, although in less depth, a similar concept to liberation spirituality which he calls radical spirituality or spirit (Kovel, 1988). Kovel referred to his work as a philosophy of spirit (Kovel, 1991). This emphasis does not hinder Kovel's work from maintaining a "political stance [that] is frankly to the left" (Kovel, 1991, p.5). Nor does it stop me from finding his work to be a critical theory, because it carries the following characteristics: a critique of domination, goals of liberation and a connection between people's subjectivities and socio-political structures (Mullaly, 2002).

Kovel also referred to his work as an "appropriation of liberation theology" (Kovel, 1991, p. 3). *Liberation theology* has been described as a political and theological movement that began in Latin America in the late 1960's and early 1970's (Evans, 1992). It involves a combination of theology with Marxism and is "built on utopian discourses of emancipation and revolution" (Batstone, 1997, p.149). It is now probably more accurate to refer to liberation theologies, rather than liberation theology, as the latter can have different foci such as postmodern liberation theology, black liberation theology and

feminist liberation theology (Batstone, Mendieta, Lorentzen, & Hopkins, 1997). Liberation theologies are unique in that they use theology to critique and challenge oppression (particularly class oppression) and at the same time they use a social analysis to critique theological positions or religions which comply with systems and structures of domination (Mendieta, 1997). Liberation theology, like Kovel's liberation spirituality, emphasizes spiritual "as well as social, political and economic liberation" (Evan, 1992, p.136).

A few social workers have discussed liberation theologies in their work (e.g. Breton, 1992; Evan, 1992; Lindsay, 2002). They mainly consider how liberation theologies can help to empower people who are oppressed through praxis, dialogue and conscientization (consciousness raising) (Breton, 1992; Evans, 1992). A basic problem with using liberation theologies in relation to social work is that they are theologies, so they are primarily based on religious ideologies, and tend to ignore spiritual understandings outside a religious context. However, Kovel's liberation spirituality does allow for a consideration of spirituality both within and outside a religious context. This makes for a broader and more inclusive analysis.

Liberation theologies also place a great deal of emphasis on context. Evans (1992) writes that liberation theologies are "truly indigenous. Liberation theolog[ies] coming out of Peru, for example, cannot be merely transported to Sri Lanka or any other country" (Evans, 1992, p.139). Liberation theologies cannot simply be transported into a western context. Kovel's idea of liberation spirituality arises from, rather than being transported into, a western context, and so contextualised, is more suited to social work practice in western countries.

Another benefit of using Kovel's work is that he has admitted his writing is not "free of cultural and gender bias" (Kovel, 1991, p.14). He has also acknowledged the "sharp contrast between the scope of human spirituality and the limited perspective" he can bring to it (Kovel, 1991, p.13). It is important to be aware of the limitations of any

analysis, particularly an analysis in relation to spiritual issues, given the “immense scale of spiritual phenomena” (Kovel, 1991, p.13).

There are many synergies between Kovel’s work and critical approaches to social work. Many other works address and explore spirituality in relation to social and political issues including Rothberg’s (1993) ‘socially engaged spirituality’, Lerner’s (2000) ‘emancipatory spirituality’, Ferrer’s (2002) ‘participatory spirituality’ and Tacey’s (2003) ‘revolutionary spirituality’. But, one significant reason for selecting Kovel’s work is that liberation spirituality is a critical theory. As identified earlier, it connects people’s subjectivities to social structures and also maintains a critique of domination and goals of liberation. Also, unlike any of the above-mentioned approaches, Kovel makes a much more detailed and significant connection between oppression, emancipation and spirituality. He takes into account both the emancipatory and oppressive or negative uses of spirituality. Furthermore, in contrast to other approaches to spiritual issues that could be called critical (such as feminist spirituality) Kovel’s work is broad enough to consider different forms of oppression and emancipation in relation to spirituality (not just gender).

One seeming contradiction in drawing on Kovel’s work is my focus on postmodernism, since he disagrees with significant postmodern ideas and has clear modernist themes throughout his work. However, while he admits to disagreeing with significant postmodern ideas such as the view that there is no truth but only ‘truths’, some postmodern themes are evident in his work. An example, is his notion “that power is not some homogenous substance...to be used here and there, but specially produced according to the particular configuration of a given place and time” (Kovel, 1991, p.36). He also emphasises diversity and proposes an analysis of language, believing that language does not represent reality (Kovel, 1991). So, Kovel’s work tends to hold both postmodern ideas together with modernist themes.

Liberation spirituality as developed by Kovel is much broader than the themes I am able to draw on in this thesis. A large portion of Kovel’s work involves a philosophical

enquiry and a psychoanalysis of spirituality. A significant portion of his work is not directly relevant to my discussions. While Kovel's work refers to a western context in general, some is specific to an American context, and some of this specific analysis may not be relevant to an Australian context. Given these differences I will draw on key points rather than the whole of liberation spirituality. These key points will be explored in the next section.

Liberation spirituality

As outlined previously, Kovel distinguishes spirit from soul and from spirituality. For him soul is the "spiritual form taken by the self" (Kovel, 1991, p.33). He describes spirit as "*what happens to us as the boundaries of the self give way*" or the "relation between the person and the universe" (Kovel, 1991, p.1 & 33). So, "*spirit is a relation of the self to what is beyond itself, soul is the self insofar as it partakes of that relationship*" (Kovel, 1991, p.33). Spirituality is "*the practice of spirit – the conscious, goal-directed activity which brings spirit and soul into being*" (Kovel, 1991, p.198).

Kovel views spirituality as influenced by historical, cultural and social factors. He writes, "spirituality is a continual process of discovery and struggle enacted in this world, which is to say in history" (Kovel, 1991, p.83). In his understanding people's spirituality is 'real' but it does not stand "above history and human being[s]" (Kovel, 1991, p.89). This is where complexity as well as contradiction arises in Kovel's work. In Kovel's view spirit "not only appears across all historical situations: it is essentially beyond history" (Kovel, 1988, p.329). So spirit is seen as both historically bound and transhistorical at the same time (Kovel, 1988; Kovel, 1991). This contradiction in Kovel's definition, which is like others existing in many spiritual understandings such as certainty alongside uncertainty, is useful when exploring spiritual issues because it does not simplify spirituality to either/or.

According to Kovel's definitions, people seek to realise spirit and soul (spirituality) within their particular historical and social location, and as such, spirituality is bound to the world. Spirit is seen as both within and beyond this world and its history and society.

But no person holds an absolute or ultimate spiritual truth because their access to spirit, through spirituality, is filtered through historical and social location. This filtering inevitably influences people's interpretations of spirit. It means that people cannot claim a universal access to truth in relation to spirituality. It also accounts for the understanding of spirituality as a 'real' phenomena, not just historically and socially produced, although influenced by historical and social locations.

Aside from these important understandings Kovel's discussion of liberation spirituality provides two key points, which will be explored in the following section. They are: the marginalisation and alienation of spirituality, and the role of spirituality in social oppression and emancipation.

The marginalisation and alienation of spirituality

De-spiritualisation, otherwise known as the marginalisation of spirituality in contemporary western society, has been created by a number of factors. As explained in chapter two modernity, secularisation, anti-spiritual science and dualism are some of the factors contributing to de-spiritualisation. Kovel (1991), in particular, explores capitalism as a primary factor and this will be focused on in the following section. The following section will show how social factors can marginalise and alienate the spiritual. It is written with the awareness that capitalism is just one of the many social factors influencing spirituality.

Under Capitalism: Spiritual alienation from others

For Kovel (1991) capitalism is more than just a social and economic system. It involves:

“basic relations between people, relations between humanity and nature, a fundamental orientation to reality, notions of power, and the drive toward power. And all these levels sustain one another” (p.10).

Capitalism involves fundamental relations between people, relations which move away from community and towards a focus on the individual. The focus on the individual or self-interest is a cornerstone within capitalist relations. As Kovel (1991) articulates:

“capitalism tells us that the meaningful life is the life that maximizes the self. Whatever is ‘me’ has more, does more, achieves more; such is the good life, whether measured in terms of compact disks, muscles, orgasms, publicity, or cash. This is the philosophy of individualism. It is no mere idea, but an essential configuration of human relations to grease the wheels of economic accumulation. Thus the meaningful life is held to be the life in which one profits and succeeds the most. The principle of self-maximization is the personal ideology of capitalist society: it makes society seem worthwhile, and provides an endless supply of eager beavers to hustle their way to the top” (p.92).

Above community and the social good, the individual is paramount in capitalist societies. Individuals compete with other individuals for self-interest or success, which is usually measured in term of material acquisition. Competition is needed for a capitalist market to succeed, and this divides people, making for relations that are oppositional. Kovel (1991) encapsulates this in the following:

“Individual success in the marketplace is always at the expense of others; the meaning of self-maximization is the minimization of others...There is a shadow: each success of the self is another’s failure. And whether or not one succeeds, in this scheme of things all others are reduced to antagonists. This means that each other person becomes radically Other, and is not recognized as a fellow being of the self” (p. 92).

Under capitalism, people are pitted against each other, and the outcome economically is always winner-loser. This inequality is a prerequisite for the success of capitalism. Kovel

(1991) suggests that the result of this competitive situation is a lose-lose relation rather than a win-lose relation. He writes:

“A bitter paradox, specific for capitalist society, results. The moment of the self’s triumph, and the summum bonum of the system as a whole, is also the moment of its alienation: that occasion when the self stands apart and radically separated, surrounded by a world dimly populated by Otherness. Thus alienation describes the spiritual as well as economic life of capital...” (Kovel, 1991, p. 93).

Mullaly (2002) submits that alienation involves isolation and separation from both oneself and from others. Kovel (1991) argues that spirituality is the relationship between self and others, so spiritual alienation involves alienation from one's own essence or self and alienation from others. He argues that capitalism divides people along the lines of class, and divides individuals from each other, that is, the capitalist system is spiritually alienating. Therefore, under Kovel's rationale it can be identified that alienation is not only occurring socially and economically, but also spiritually, as it divides people.

Spiritual alienation from oneself

Mullaly (2002), drawing on Marx, provides a more detailed outline of four ways in which he sees that alienation occurs under capitalism. These include:

- “worker’s alienation from the product of his or her labour” (Mullaly, 2002, p.63)
- “alienation from his or herself...alienated from his or her own activity, which is also alienation from his or her body, mind, and spirit, which, taken together constitutes the self” (Mullaly, 2002, p.63)
- “alienation from human essence as the worker is denied realization of his or her inherent human potential through work activity” (Mullaly, 2002, p.63)
- “alienation from other people” (Mullaly, 2002, p.63)

As the second point above indicates, capitalism alienates people from themselves and in doing so alienates them from spirit, an aspect of the self. Kovel discusses in more depth what spiritual alienation from oneself involves. Kovel, referring to the writing of Marx, links capitalist production to spiritual alienation. He writes:

In capitalism “value is detached from human activity and placed onto the object made to be sold...it means that the capitalist mode of production displaces the core of human activity from human beings to things. If spirit is somehow a function of what it means to be a human being – and I do not see how this conclusion can be escaped – then it follows that under capitalism, spirit is bound to be thwarted, or as Marx (following Hegel) would have said, alienated” (Kovel, 1991, p.11).

The shifting value from human beings to things means that capitalism is alienating people from their human essence, from their being. Marx viewed capitalist society itself as “an alienating force dominating his or her essential being and nature” (Pease, 2003, p.195). People’s human essence or humanity is concerned with their *being* human, and spirit for Kovel is seen as a way of *being*, so the shift from being to things alienates people’s spirituality and humanity (Kovel, 1991).

Capitalism can also alienate people from themselves by forming a clear divide between the ‘material’, which is valued, and the ‘immaterial’, which is devalued. Kovel (1991) argues that in this divide:

“spirituality becomes part of the ‘otherworld’, and loses relevance to the economy and politics. Since the economic sphere is the domain of what is rational, rationality in capitalism belongs with the despiritualized economy and polity; that is to say, reason becomes narrow and technical, losing sight of the whole...In such an atmosphere, spirit becomes residual, and spirituality becomes irrational and irrelevant.” (p.11).

This paragraph makes an important point that under capitalism people's spirituality is disassociated from the prominent economic and political spheres. Spirituality then becomes devalued and dismissed as irrational and irrelevant to the material world and the power structures operating in this world. Through both the structures and the discourses of capitalism, spirituality is marginalised, the "economic side of life – the production, distribution, and consumption of goods – is usually placed at the opposite end of the spectrum from the spiritual" (Daly, 1988, p.107). Lerner (2000) too considers this a serious problem. He writes that people are "very deeply distorted...in a society whose very definitions of rationality and productivity are fundamentally Spirit denying" (Lerner, 2000, p.96). If, as Kovel and others argue, spirituality is a function of what it means to be human (spirit as a way of being), then to dismiss and exclude it as irrelevant from the majority of human activity, such as material and economic activity, is to alienate people from themselves.

Spiritual alienation historically

The contemporary spiritual climate is vastly different from the past. Kovel critiques the marginalisation and alienation of spirituality in contemporary times. However, he does not see pre-modern times as a good example of a non de-spiritualised age. In pre-modern times, spirituality was valued and people had "the conviction that spirituality really mattered and had the power to define the terms of existence" (Kovel, 1991, p.8). So, while there was no de-spiritualisation as such, Kovel believes there was spiritual alienation. Traditional and official religions "alienated the essence of spiritual[ity]" by "enforcing subservience [to] temporal power" or complying with and reinforcing systems of domination (Kovel, 1991, p.8). The division that occurs in domination is incongruent with the connection between people, which is part of spirituality. For Kovel, a move away from de-spiritualisation and spiritual alienation does not just mean challenging capitalism but challenging all forms of domination within society.

Connecting the spiritual and the material

Throughout his writings on de-spiritualisation and spiritual alienation Kovel makes a clear connection between the material and the spiritual. He considers:

“spirit is not opposed to matter, or the flesh; rather it is revealed, indeed created, in the freeing of matter and flesh...spirit is not a by-product, or an indicator...it is [a] lived process itself” (Kovel, 1991, p.3)

Kovel connects spirituality to material emancipation. Specifically, he is concerned with how people's spiritualities are devalued and alienated in western societies by the conditions of capitalism and all forms of domination, and therefore how the liberation of spirituality will require social transformation and a change in social relations. Kovel (1991) argues, “there is no spiritual liberation without material liberation” (p.159). This is very relevant to critical postmodern social work theory and its concept of praxis. Praxis is a term often used in critical theory to indicate the convergence of action and reflection, or when “action and reflection occur simultaneously” (Friere, 1972, p.123). Praxis means that “one cannot ‘do’ theory or practice in isolation; rather, it is a reflexive process of learning by doing and of doing by learning” (Ife, 1999, p.220). Kovel proposes a praxis between spiritual and material liberation. He argues that you cannot have spiritual liberation without transforming the social conditions marginalizing and alienating people's spirituality. Likewise, material liberation involves spirituality and cannot take place without a consideration of spiritual issues.

Kovel's praxis is compatible with the praxis within critical postmodern social work theories and allows for the marriage of spiritual and material liberation. It also helps counter positions on spirituality which suggest spiritual consciousness/reflection will automatically lead to social change (e.g. McLaughlin & Davidson, 1994; Tacey, 2003). For Kovel (1991) spirituality is “neither empty nor idle, but shapes action in the world, or praxis”, it is “a way of being and acting in the world with decisive effects on real life” (p.83). Spiritual reflection without action is problematic because it does not necessarily

lead to action. Further, spirituality without action, according to Kovel's understanding, is not a way of being, rather it is a way of thinking (spirituality is more than just reflection).

The role of spirituality in social oppression & emancipation

In the previous section I considered how spirituality is influenced by social factors, by drawing in particular on capitalism. Next I will focus on the influences and insights that spirituality can offer current understandings of social oppression and emancipation. The specific topics that will be examined are subjectivity, and a spiritual or ontological 'level' of oppression and emancipation.

Spirituality and subjectivities

Poststructuralists and postmodernists use the term "'subjectivity' rather than 'identity' to refer to the 'conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of the individual, her [or his] sense of herself [or himself] and her [or his] ways of understanding her [or his] relation to the world'" (Healy, 1999, p.121). Subjectivities refer to the ways people are and see themselves in relation to the world on both a conscious and unconscious level. In critical postmodern social work theory subjectivities are viewed as multiple and contradictory (Pease & Fook, 1999; Fook, 2002; Allan, Pease & Briskman, 2003). For example, a white woman may see herself as both an oppressor and as oppressed. Critical postmodern social work theory also considers the possibility that subjectivities may not be fixed or stable (Healy, 1999). Changing context may lead to a change in the way people see themselves in relation to the world. Mullaly (2002) illustrates this in his statement that "while living in Australia I found myself emphasizing my Canadianness more than I ever did living in Canada" (p.58).

Critical postmodern social work theory focuses attention on how discourses shape people's subjectivities. Healy (1999) writes, "subjectivity is the product of discourse and one's 'identity' varies according to the discourses operating within specific contexts" (p.121). However, it is not just discourses and contexts shaping people's subjectivities but also power structures. Crinall (1999) considers how subjectivities are "changing

according to situations, circumstances and expectations which are contextualised within a social, cultural and political framework of regulatory control mechanisms that exercise power...” (p.75). Subjectivities are also shaped by people’s physical bodies as they are “‘fused inextricably together’” (Fook, 2002, p.76). As Fook (2002) articulates the “knowledge we make for ourselves and create for others, is mediated through our physical perceptions and experiences” (p.77). For example, a woman who experiences domestic violence may have a particular understanding of herself and her relationship to the world that is influenced by discourses on domestic violence and by the political and cultural systems of power within a particular context. But, her physical experiences and perceptions also influence her subjectivities.

A variety of factors therefore influence and construct people’s subjectivities or ‘identities’. Critical postmodern social work theorists focus on how people’s subjectivities are constructed, and also on how people can engage in the construction and negotiation of their subjectivities (Fook, 2002). For example, as Crinall (1999) outlines some women have changed the discourse from ‘victims’ of sexual abuse to ‘survivors’ of sexual abuse, challenging the passive victim subjectivities and replacing them with subjectivities that highlight women’s strength.

While critical postmodern social work theorists and practitioners emphasise people’s ability to negotiate and change their subjectivities, so writers on spirituality and politics consider how people can use spirituality to challenge and negotiate their subjectivities. Particularly writers such as Tacey (2003) consider how particular spiritualities (such as ecological spirituality) can alter people’s understanding of themselves in relation to the world. For example, ecological spirituality encourages social and environmental responsibility as people view themselves as deeply connected to the environment (Tacey, 2003). Tacey (2003) suggests that spiritual ideas such as these can lead to social change through people taking social and environmental action. He (2003) contends that spirituality can change people’s subjectivities, ways of thinking of and seeing themselves and their place in the world, on a larger scale leading to a ‘spiritual revolution’, and that this will lead to social change. While I believe spirituality can be linked to subjectivities I

do not agree with Tacey's position that spiritual thinking will lead to action because it assumes that thought will automatically lead to action. There is a gap between thought and action, and this is often highlighted in most spiritual and religious stances. For example, religious and spiritual beliefs and ideas that encourage love and tolerance do not necessarily translate into action or tolerant behaviour. Also, some spiritual perspectives are concerned with social responsibility but others turn inwards or focus predominately on otherworldly matters so they may not support emancipatory politics.

However, in some cases, spirituality is used as a site to negotiate subjectivities for emancipatory purposes or results. For example liberation theologies challenge the idea of fatalism among the poor, using theology in an attempt to liberate the poor from the idea of fate; "from a sense that one's situation in life has been foreordained, and there is nothing that can be done about it" (Lindsay, 2002, p.132). Reconstructing this idea, can lead to people seeing themselves as active agents of change determining their own 'fate' (Batstone, Mendieta, Lorentzen & Hopkins, 1997). Another example is the Goddess movement, where the idea of a male figure-head as creator is replaced by images and symbols of women as creator and as powerful (Weaver, 1985; Starhawk, 1999). This challenges dominant religious ideas and may allow for "alternative social structures or power relationships to be considered" by women (Finley, 1991, p.352). A further example is that some Muslim women (for example in universities in Cairo) have used the Koran to challenge the lack of women's rights in the Middle East ('Unveiling Islam', 2003). They have argued that the Koran does not advocate for female genital mutilation, that it provides women full consent to marriage, rights to property and rights to divorce ('Unveiling Islam', 2003).

These examples illustrate that spirituality and religion can be powerful sites for people to negotiate their view of themselves in relation to the world. However, with multiple and contradictory subjectivities possible, and with some people not combining thought and action, spirituality is not necessarily an effective site for negotiating subjectivities. It is also possible that non-emancipatory spiritual perspectives may change people's subjectivities confirming oppression. It is important to be aware of how religious and

spiritual beliefs can impact on people's subjectivities, and also that as emancipatory and oppressive subjectivities can be created by spiritual and religious beliefs they can also be negotiated, challenged and reconstructed by them.

Connecting subjectivities

Kovel's concept of self-Other in his liberation spirituality framework, forms a deep connection between people, and their subjectivities, which could be useful to critical postmodern social work theory. Like Kovel, Lerner also writes about this deep connection between people at the level of subjectivities, arguing:

"I don't mean to be merely suggesting that as human beings we are affected by other human beings. My claim is stronger. Our fundamental essence, our core being, exists in relationship with others, as part of a community of meaning, love and solidarity. The basic reality is, in the words of the theologian Martin Buber, to be in an "I-Thou" relationship, in which our subjectivity itself is a relational subjectivity" (Lerner, 1991, p.196).

Referred to here as a relational subjectivity or 'I-Thou' (Buber, 1970; Mendes-Flohr, 1989), Kovel refers to this as self-Other.

Kovel argues, that "history entails an unending dialectic of splitting and the overcoming of splitting. These splits are created in domination and overcome in liberation" (Kovel, 1991, p.2). For example, in gender domination there is a split between men and women. When this splitting occurs in any form of domination the party which is dominated becomes 'Other', for example woman is 'Other' from man. Kovel (1991) describes 'Otherness' as "a function of alienation. The Other is the stranger, the alien. The more alienated a society or person, the more horrific the Otherness" (p.52). Othering or the splitting of the self from the Other is a crucial part of domination. For Kovel (1991), "no domination occurs without splitting" (p.56). He clearly outlines this process of splitting as referring to "a kind of 'being' in which the Other is not recognized as having any

common 'being' with the self" (Kovel, 1991, p.54). For example, in black and white race relations the white person within their subjectivity may see themselves as the 'self' or subject, while the black person becomes 'Other' or the object. But, while the white person may see the black person as Other this is not something that occurs passively. Kovel writes "Otherness is not something that passively happens; it is produced" through language, consciousness, and economic and social relations (p.52). If Othering is something that is produced, it stands to reason that it is something that can also be actively engaged with and challenged.

Kovel considers that although Othering involves splitting the Other from the self, that a significant portion of Otherness is constructed in the self. Othering is not just something we do to or place onto other groups or individuals "Otherness does not simply pertain to Other beings: it is, rather inscribed in our own way of being" (Kovel, 1991, p.56). We constitute ourselves or establish ourselves as subjects in relation to the Other. Therefore, who we are, our very way of being, and the way we view our relationship to the world (subjectivity) is embedded in Otherness.

While people have, to an extent, self-autonomy and individual subjectivities, there are 'relational subjectivities', which deeply connect the self to the Other (or the dominant to the oppressed). Kovel argues:

"we are deeply attached to the delusory idea that the self is a separate and detachable entity from other selves, as if it were a body in the world, with an envelope of time and space separating it from other bodies. We view the self this way for a number of interlocking reasons: because the felt experience of the 'I' peremptorily excludes all other; because we look at the physical body we inhabit and observe that it is substantially different and discrete from other bodies; and because we live in a civilization organized around the meeting of discrete individuals in the marketplace, the social ideal of which is the maximization and autonomy of the

individual self. For all these reasons we conclude that the self is like a discrete body. I would argue that this is all wrong” (1991, p.47)

While Kovel does connect people to other people in terms of their humanity, here he connects dominant and oppressed people to each other, or the self to the Other. He writes “Other is part of the self, and the self is part of the Other, and of all other selves” (Kovel, 1991, p.47-48). So, the way people see themselves and their relationship to the world (their subjectivities), are shaped by “*self-Other*” (p.48). This self-Other understanding proposed by Kovel can still take into consideration multiple and contradicting subjectivities that are highlighted by a critical postmodern perspective. Furthermore, the self-Other understanding makes a much deeper connection between the subjectivities of oppressors and the oppressed.

Spiritual or ontological ‘level’ of emancipation and oppression

Critical postmodern social work theory makes a connection between the subjectivities of oppressed and dominant groups. This connection is made through the concept of internalised oppression and domination, which links oppressed and oppressors at a psychological level. As outlined in earlier chapters internalised oppression involves oppressed groups and individuals accepting the discrimination against them within society (Pheterson, 1986). So, “oppressed [people] become agents of their own oppression”, and “by internalising the opinion the oppressors hold of them, they come to lack confidence in themselves and believe in the invulnerability and power of the oppressor” (Pease, 2003, p.192-193). People who internalise oppression see themselves in relation to the world as the oppressors see them, as inferior and subordinate.

Conversely, internalised domination involves individuals or groups accepting that they are in a dominant position over others, it involves viewing the oppressed as lesser and believing that they are superior to those who are oppressed (Pheterson, 1986). People who have internalised domination also have a close relationship to the oppressed. Their understanding of themselves and their relationship to the world is constituted through the Othering of the oppressed, which allows them to establish themselves as the subject, the

self to oppressed people's Other (self-Other) (Kovel, 1991). Other authors have commented on the strong link or connection between oppressed and dominant peoples, particularly within the process of internalised oppression and domination. For example, Frantz Fanon (1967) described a master-slave dynamic to explain oppressor and oppressed relations. Mullaly (2002) comments on how the process of domination and Othering others "confirms the master's self-worth, identity, and humanity...The master is elevated to human life and the slave is reduced to animal life" (p.126).

Kovel too connects the oppressed and oppressors both in 'self-Other' subjectivities and in relation to internalised oppression and domination. However, he also makes a deeper and different connection. While he agrees that oppression and domination occurs at a psychological level influencing people's subjectivities, he also contends that domination occurs at an ontological level or at a level of 'being', that "there is *being*, over and against particular beings" (Kovel, 1991, p.46). He states that "domination is always more than...a [material] power relation", domination is also "ontologically a condition of *being-over*" (Kovel, 1991, p.102). As Kovel (1991) contends, "the dominator exerts power by extracting being from the dominated", for example, "the white racist does not simply exist in a materially exploitative relation to the black; he makes himself into more of a human being, and the black into less...[and the] male does more than control the labor and body of the women: he makes himself into the bearer of logos, of history itself..." (p.102). So, for Kovel "the Other is that figure from which being has been negated" (Kovel, 1991, p.102). I believe 'being' is about being in the world, active, transforming and that it is also about people's existence as a human being (one's humanity). This interpretation of being is based on a discussion by Kovel of the power of asserting ones being, or emancipation at the level of being, in which he states:

"a person in some situation of domination, in which his or her being has been expropriated by another, resists, saying in effect 'I am a person, not a thing'. This statement can be rephrased thus: 'I am a subject, not merely an object; and I am not Cartesian subject, whose subjectivity is pure inwardness, but rather an expressive subject, a transformative subject; I

am a subject, therefore, who needs to project my being into the world, and transform the world as an expression of my being; and finally I will appropriate my being rather than have it expropriated” (Kovel, 1991, p.108).

Spirituality is involved at this ontological level or at this level of being. Kovel states, “in sum, spirit, is a way of being”, which it is fundamentally connected to ones humanity or ‘being’ human and that involves ones relationship to world and to others (Kovel, 1991, p.65). Furthermore, Kovel believes that “spirit is the possible, perhaps the necessary ontological ground of emancipation” (Kovel, 1988, p.303). He argues that there is an ontological level of domination and emancipation, and that spirituality, a way of being (or an ontological ground), engages with domination and emancipation at this ontological level.

The master and slave dynamic illustrate this ontological level. Mullaly (2002) considers how the Othering and the domination of groups and individuals could psychologically and socially confirm, “the master’s self-worth, identity, and humanity...The master is elevated to human life and the slave is reduced to animal life” (p.126). Kovel argues that master and slave dynamics are more than just psychological or social, that “the Master in the dialectic of domination...assigns nonbeing to the Slave” (Kovel, 1991, p.147). Just as being is about being an active part of the world, and about humanity, nonbeing is about denying people’s humanity, seeing them as “a passive piece of meat, a thing” (Kovel, 1991, p.149). So, in nonbeing people are portrayed as things, passive objects as opposed to human beings who are active subjects.

This link between humanity, oppression and emancipation has been made before. It is a theme in works on emancipation and oppression. Marx’s concept of alienation under capitalism emphasises “the loss of humanity associated with capitalism” (Pease, 2003, p.195). An analysis of black slavery in America reveals the animalistic characteristics used to describe and thereby de-humanise slaves (Mullally, 2002). Most feminist analysis has observed that women are often connected to nature, and nature itself is Othered and

portrayed as split from humanity (Adams, 1993). Likewise, just as domination has been associated with the de-humanisation of people, emancipation has been associated with a quest to become more fully human. Freire (1972), a prominent advocate for radical education and a writer on the process of liberation, stated that emancipation or freedom is “the indispensable condition for the quest for human completion” (p.31). Freire also proposed that, “dialogue, as the encounter among men [and women] to ‘name’ the world, is a fundamental precondition for their true *humanization*” (my emphasis) (Freire, 1972, p.133).

De-humanization is a result of domination, and people’s emancipation or liberation is tied to their humanity, their ‘way of being’ or engaging with the world. For Kovel, and others, spirit is a way of being and “a function of what it means to be a human being”, so spirit or spirituality is tied to people’s de-humanisation under domination and humanization in liberation (Kovel, 1991, p.11). Therefore, there is an important spiritual level within oppression and emancipation. The next question is how does one begin to analyse a spiritual or ontological level of emancipation and oppression?

In exploring this question I will return to the concept of internalised oppression. Internalised oppression is said to cause people to be alienated from themselves “the estrangement or separating of a person from some source of the essential attributes of personhood” (Pease, 2003, p.192). This is seen as a psychological effect of internalised oppression. However, in liberation spirituality Kovel also identifies a spiritual effect of internalised oppression (at an ontological level) that is alienation from one’s being which is a result of believing oneself to be inferior, or less than, other human beings.

Internalised domination has been observed to have other consequences such as the stunting of the emotional capacity of oppressors (Pease, 2003). Pease (2003) writes, “when one dehumanises people, one denies one’s capacity for emotional connectedness” (p.194). Kovel (1991) argues that domination and de-humanising others has spiritual consequences as well as psychological/emotional/social. As we have seen, he considers people’s relationship to others to be spiritual. So, by de-humanising others and seeing

oneself as superior, spirituality is oppressed and de-humanization occurs. As spirituality and humanity involves connectedness to others, internalised domination deforms this connection by splitting people from each other. So, while there may be social and economic 'benefits' to oppressing others there are severe psychological and ontological consequences.

Conclusion

Overall Kovel concludes that de-spiritualisation, the marginalisation and alienation of spirituality, is occurring within Western society. Kovel also argues that social factors, such as capitalism, are affecting spirituality. In particular, capitalism is causing a division between people. As spiritual alienation involves the division of people from each other, capitalism is spiritually alienating. Furthermore, capitalism alienates people from themselves, which inevitably alienates people from the spiritual aspect of themselves. This is done firstly by capitalism shifting value from people to things, and secondly by capitalism dismissing the spiritual or 'immaterial' from political and economic life, causes people's spirituality to be alienated from the majority of human activity. Kovel's liberation spirituality also offers the argument that in order for de-spiritualisation to be challenged all forms of social domination must be challenged, in order to avoid spiritual alienation as it has occurred historically. In addition, liberation spirituality offers a link between material liberation and spiritual liberation, so there is a material and spiritual praxis.

Through the above mentioned ideas liberation spirituality offers the view that spirituality is an important aspect of people's marginalisation and alienation that needs liberation. A significant component of critical postmodern social work theory and practice is about identifying levels or aspects of domination, such as at the level of discourse, and then seeking liberation at these levels. Yet, it fails to consider the spiritual level of marginalisation, alienation and liberation. I believe this is crucial and as Kovel writes we need "not only political and economic revolution but a total revolution in all spheres of domination", including the spiritual (Kovel, 1991, p.214).

It can also be seen that critical postmodern social work theory offers Kovel's liberation spirituality a more complex understanding of subjectivities and Othering, an understanding which takes into consideration diversity and contradiction. At the same time, Kovel's ideas allow critical postmodern social work to consider that spirituality and religion can be a site for the negotiation of subjectivities and the negotiation of social change. His understandings allow for a deeper connection between oppressed and dominant relations ('self-Other'). He allows us to consider that there is a spiritual aspect to emancipation (becoming fully human) and to oppression (de-humanisation).

A number of crucial ideas have been considered in this chapter. But what does this mean for critical postmodern social work theory? The following chapter will consider this question by exploring the theoretical and practical implications of liberation spirituality.

CHAPTER EIGHT – INTEGRATING SPIRITUALITY INTO CRITICAL POSTMODERN SOCIAL WORK

In this final chapter I reiterate the questions which guided my research and the ideas that have emerged from this research process. I will then discuss some valuable concepts that have emerged from connecting critical postmodern social work, liberation spirituality and spiritual ways of knowing. These concepts can enhance a critical postmodern approach to social work by assisting it to better meet its claim of being ‘holistic’ in theory and practice. I will discuss possible implications of these concepts, and also some limitations. Then I will identify some directions for future research. This thesis concludes with a brief summary of my arguments.

Research questions & conclusions

I began my research by focusing on and intending to explore the following questions:

- What is the relationship between spirituality and social work? How is this reflected in social work literature and theory?
- How can critical postmodern social work theory open up a space for spirituality?
- What does Kovel’s work on relating emancipatory politics and spirituality have to offer the challenge of opening up critical postmodern social work to embrace understandings of spirituality?
- What are the implications of conceptually connecting liberation spirituality and critical postmodern social work theory?

Before considering the relationship between social work and spirituality I began by exploring spirituality. From this exploration I found spirituality to be a complex concept, which is marginalised in western society by a variety of factors (including dualism, anti-spiritual science, and capitalism).

My first questions was considered by exploring the relationship between spirituality and social work. I discovered that while there is growing interest in spirituality within social work, there is still a complex, and rather tense, uncomfortable and reluctant relationship between social work, spirituality and religion. As outlined, many historical and contemporary factors have influenced and continue to influence this relationship. Through exploring the debates and contentious issues surrounding spirituality in social work I also found that many issues remain undebated or undeveloped. Of particular concern to me was the underdevelopment of theoretical or conceptual link between emancipatory politics and spiritual issues.

My next step was to examine critical social work theories from both modern and postmodern perspectives. I discovered that although there is little overt engagement with spirituality in critical social work theory there is an important spiritual aspect to emancipatory politics, which means there is a spiritual aspect to critical theories. Specifically I concluded that spiritual and immaterial factors such as faith and the human spirit are involved in emancipatory politics, and the significance of these powerful factors must be considered. These factors may in fact hold a key as to why some emancipatory movements are more successful than others.

When examining critical social work theories from a postmodern perspective I came to change my research question somewhat. Instead of considering 'how can critical postmodern social work theory open up a space for spirituality?' I came to ask 'what can spiritual ways of knowing contribute to critical postmodern social work?' And 'what can critical postmodern social work contribute to spiritual ways of knowing?' This shift from discussing spirituality and spiritual issues more broadly to focusing more specifically on spiritual 'ways of knowing' came about through thinking and writing about postmodernism and its focus on how knowledge is formed and legitimatised.

It is on the basis of what critical postmodern social work and spiritual ways of knowing have to offer each other that the following emerged as important concepts for social work theory and practice:

- The inclusion of the spiritual dimension in critical social work makes for a more holistic practice.
- Spirituality can involve both productive and oppressive power relations each of which should be reflected on.
- Historical and social contexts play a significant role in shaping people's spiritual understandings.
- Spiritual discourses also shape people's understandings of spirituality and need to be identified and de-constructed.
- Spiritual diversity and dialogue should be valued, one 'truth' should not be held over another.
- Spirituality need not be justified solely on the basis of rational ways of knowing.
- The spiritual and the material should be understood to be non-dualistic, and an integration of the two should be sought.
- The focus on spirituality in social work should not solely concentrate on the individual but should also consider people's connection to each other and to the environment or the universe.
- Spiritual understandings can hold 'apparently contradictory opposites' together and this contradiction should be acknowledged and respected.
- Dominant discourses that marginalise and de-legitimise spirituality should be deconstructed.
- Language and discourse are limited in their capacity to express, communicate and reflect knowledge.
- Spiritual knowledge allows us to consider new ways of "seeing what is knowledge, how it is generated, and how it is expressed" (Fook, 2002, p.35).
- Alternative ways of knowing can allow us to consider alternative ways of recognising, expressing and challenging oppression, for example through non-linguistic means.
- Spiritual knowledge should be honoured.

To explore my third question, ‘what does Kovel’s work on relating emancipatory politics and spirituality have to offer in the challenge to open up critical postmodern social work to embrace understandings of spirituality?’. In examining Kovel’s understandings of liberation spirituality, two main themes emerged as being important for my work. The first is the marginalisation and alienation of spirituality. The second is the role of spirituality in social oppression and emancipation, particularly considering factors such as how people’s spiritual subjectivities and humanity is tied to social oppression and emancipation. In my exploration of these important themes concepts began to emerge which could expand the understandings of emancipation and oppression present in critical postmodern social work. These concepts are as follows:

- People’s spirituality is so interconnected with material and social factors that these factors can marginalise and alienate people’s spirituality.
- An integrated approach is needed to achieve emancipation, one which considers spiritual liberation - how it can be achieved and what is oppressing it.
- Spiritual and religious beliefs impact on people’s subjectivities. Just as emancipatory and oppressive subjectivities can be created by spiritual and religious beliefs they can also be negotiated, challenged and reconstructed by them.
- Since liberation is a process of humanization and domination is a process of de-humanisation, and spirituality is tied to one’s humanity, there is an important spiritual aspect to social liberation and oppression.
- Another level of oppression and emancipation can be considered, and this is an ontological level, a level of being at which spirituality occurs. Spirituality can engage with oppression and emancipation at this level.

Implications for critical postmodern social work theory

As stated earlier my concluding research question was ‘what are the implications of conceptually connecting spirituality and critical postmodern social work theory?’ This question will be examined in the following section.

Critical postmodern social work theorists believe that they offer a more holistic understanding of emancipation, that their theories enable social workers to locate themselves “into a holistic contextual picture” (Fook & Pease, 1999, p.229). As argued previously these theoretical pictures presented are in fact not holistic, but they do have the potential to be. They have the potential to be more holistic because critical postmodern social work theory is focused on how knowledge is created, how it becomes ‘legitimate’ and is receptive to marginalised or “different ways of knowing” (Fook, 2002, p.44). As such this social work approach is in a good position to open up a space for spirituality, to begin to consider the marginalised knowledge of spirituality, and thereby to develop a more holistic practice.

Furthermore, critical postmodern social work theorists have criticised critical social work theory in the modernist tradition for not acknowledging the different levels at which people experience oppression (for example the local), and for not developing “ways of engaging effectively with the multiple realities of people’s lives” (Allan, 2003a, p.36). These criticisms could also be levelled at critical postmodern social work theorists given that they overlook and do not engage effectively with the spiritual level at which oppression can be experienced. An engagement with spiritual knowledge would allow critical postmodern social work theorists to consider spiritual experiences of oppression and ways of knowing.

Alternative ways of knowing oppression have lead to alternative ways of challenging and understanding oppression. For example, critical postmodern social work theorists are starting to consider theoretically, bodily ways of knowing and the kinds of ways in which people experience oppression through their bodies. This theory considers how people’s physical appearances carry “social connotations” and have a “role in defining [their] social place and identity” (Fook, 2002, p.77). Some people for example report feeling disembodied, or physically detached when they experience domestic violence. This is a physical or bodily way of experiencing and knowing oppression. Feeling emotionally detached from oneself as a result of domestic violence would be an emotional way of

knowing oppression. These alternative ways of knowing (emotional and bodily) also open up possibilities for alternative ways of challenging oppression. Emotional ways of knowing lead to an engagement with emotions that occur beyond rational ways of knowing such as irrational fear or hatred, and to a consideration of how these factors can play a role in oppression (for example racism). Contemplating the role of irrational fears and hatred in oppression may cause people to consider that oppression cannot just be challenged using rationality and logic alone. Oppression must be challenged at all the levels at which it is experienced (Fook & Pease, 1999).

Examining spiritual ways of knowing can lead to an engagement with how people know and experience oppression at a spiritual level. For example, as discussed previously, people can feel detached or alienated from their spirituality as a result of social oppression under the individualism of capitalism (Kovel, 1991). If people can experience oppression at a spiritual or ontological level, then people can also resist oppression at this level. Wong (2004) suggests spiritual knowing can be used as a way of challenging oppression. An example she gives in her work with social work students in a classroom setting where she invites them to use mindfulness, a spiritual way of knowing, in order to disrupt dominant ways of thinking. As explained in chapter six, Wong proposes the practice of mindfulness, which “is about being here, fully present with all our activities and thoughts, with body and mind united...”, as a method of freeing “ourselves from the constraints of the conceptual mind...” (Wong, 2004, p.5 & 6). If critical postmodern social work theory includes spirituality as a level at which people can experience oppression, then this would lead to new ways of understanding and challenging oppression.

Overall, consideration of spiritual ways of knowing in critical postmodern approaches to social work theory would allow them to be more expansive and holistic. It would allow spiritual understandings and experiences of oppression to be considered, and could also lead to consideration of how oppression can be resisted at spiritual levels.

Implications for critical postmodern social work theory also arise from the idea that there are spiritual and immaterial factors embedded in emancipatory politics. As discussed previously, these factors, such as love, hope, faith, the human spirit, altering consciousness and envisioning a new reality are crucial aspects of emancipatory politics. If critical postmodern social work theorists were to consider these ideas, feelings and spiritual understandings that are rarely explicitly acknowledged, this may lead to a deeper examination of what motivates and sustains emancipatory politics, and also to contemplation about why some emancipatory movements are more successful than others.

As well as considering a spiritual level of emancipation and oppression and spiritual aspects to emancipatory politics, my collection of concepts also proposes the idea that there is an innately spiritual aspect to social oppression and emancipation. Most forms of oppression involve de-humanisation, and liberation can be described as a quest to become more fully human (Freire, 1972). Spirituality has been strongly linked to people's humanity, and to people's connection with others (Kovel, 1991). So, to de-humanise or alienate people from others through oppression is bound to affect their spirituality (Kovel, 1991). For critical postmodern social work theorists this means that an examination of spirituality is essential to their consideration of social oppression and emancipation. This link between social oppression, emancipation and spirituality also highlights a pivotal concept that spiritual liberation is linked to material and social liberation, and conversely material and social liberation is linked to spirituality. This means that an examination of spirituality in social work does not have to mean a distraction from social change. Quite the opposite, critical postmodern social work theory should have both a focus on social oppression and emancipation, and spiritual alienation and liberation. In fact, as spirituality is both affected by and affects social oppression and emancipation, an examination of one should not occur without the other.

Critical postmodern social work theory can contribute to this spiritual and material link in many ways. Firstly analysis of power relations and examination of people's social and historical context allow the influences and power relations at play within people's

spirituality to be considered. Spiritual discourses, spiritual diversity, and less rationalistic and dualistic approaches to understanding spirituality can also be considered using a critical postmodern social work lens. This lens could provide a less individualistic focus on spirituality, and an acceptance of contradictions in spirituality (such as uncertainty and certainty). Furthermore, the concept of deconstruction present in postmodern critical social work approaches means that the marginalisation and de-legitimatisation of spirituality can begin to be deconstructed. All of these contributions by critical postmodern social work theory allow for a strong connection of the material (for example power relations) with the spiritual.

Although spirituality is a concept that can be used conservatively to focus solely on individual development while ignoring a social analysis, it can also be used progressively and be intertwined with a social analysis. Critical postmodern social work can support a social analysis of spirituality. Consequently, this approach need not abandon an analysis of social injustices and power relations in order to be inclusive of spiritual issues, it can contain both. So, the social analysis within critical postmodern social work theory is congruent with a consideration of spiritual issues.

Emerging from the differences between spiritual ways of knowing and critical postmodern social work is another implication. As we have already seen critical postmodern social work theory places significant emphasis on the role of discourse and language in shaping people's experiences and understandings of reality. Spiritual ways of knowing are alternative ways of knowing and they bring with them alternative ways of expressing, communicating, and understanding, which do not have to involve language. By focusing on non-linguistic experiences we can find alternative means of expression for those experiences of oppression which are difficult to describe or express in words. Opening up critical postmodern social work theory to spiritual ways of knowing would allow the limits of discourse and language to be acknowledged and alternative ways of communicating, reflecting, understanding and experiencing oppression and emancipation to be considered.

Implications for critical postmodern social work practice

Some of the theoretical implications of my work pose challenges to social work practice. Spiritual ways of knowing allow us to consider alternative ways in which knowing is understood, experienced, communicated and reflected upon. Critical reflection is a key tool for practice, however we have seen that it is primarily based on thinking about experiences or feelings. While it attempts to engage other forms of knowing, such as emotional knowing, critical reflection is still based on rational or intellectual knowing (thoughts about feelings). Spiritual methods of reflecting or experiencing (such as forms of music and drawing) can challenge the present domination of rational thinking. In particular, the inclusion of spiritual reflection in critical reflection has the potential to help people look beyond the rational and uncover and challenge oppressive beliefs and understandings occurring at different levels. Also, the process of reflection should encompass reflection on the whole self, not just one aspect of the self (mind-intellect). Spiritual, emotional and bodily reflection should be included in critical reflection to allow for a more holistic practice through the reflection on multiple aspects of the self.

While language plays an important part in shaping oppression, there are limitations to the capacity of language to express, reflect on and communicate the breadth of oppressive experiences. Spiritual ways of knowing bring with them alternative or different ways of expressing, communicating, and understanding, which do not have to involve language. This could allow critical postmodern social workers to consider alternative and more creative ways for clients, workers and students to express and challenge oppression. These might include the ‘mindfulness’ referred to earlier (Wong, 2004), or painting, drawing, music and movement. These are techniques that some social workers may already be using, but which are not integrated theoretically into a critical postmodern social work approach.

Similarly critical postmodern social work approaches do not offer a place theoretically for workers to use spiritual ways of knowing, such as worker ‘intuition’. For example, the experience of being with a client and sensing that there was something they were holding back (Luoma, 1998). The inclusion of spiritual ways of knowing into critical postmodern

social work theory would validate the use of worker 'intuition' and other spiritual ways of knowing in practice. This is not to say that spiritual ways of knowing such as intuition should be used in direct opposition to 'evidence based' practice. My work does not call for the use of feeling instead of thinking. Rational thinking by itself or feelings by themselves are not enough, we need a "wholeness of response" (Tacey, 2003, p.104). Practitioners are involved in a wide range of activities including gathering information and taking action based on that evidence/information, being aware of clients' non-verbal bodily cues, tuning into clients' emotional responses and using ones own. Additionally, there are spiritual ways of knowing or understanding, such as "*the emotional and emphatic knowing of the heart...[and] the visionary and intuitive knowing of the soul*" (Ferrer, 2002, p.121). Exploring these spiritual ways of knowing, which practitioners may use, adds a depth to practice and makes for a more complete picture when working with clients and communities. Practitioners, as well as using their own spiritual ways of knowing in practice could invite clients to explore the spiritual aspect of themselves and their situation.

These are some of the possible practice implications that could significantly influence the development of critical postmodern social work, contributing to creative change.

Another alternative consideration of oppression and emancipation relates to people's subjectivities, the various ways in which people see themselves in relation to the world. Critical postmodern social work approaches emphasise the role of subjectivities in both resisting and reinforcing oppression. They examine how power relations, context and discourse all play a part in the shaping of subjectivities. This work considers how people's spiritualities are involved in negotiating subjectivities, and how both emancipatory and oppressive subjectivities can be created by spiritual and religious beliefs, and negotiated, challenged and reconstructed by them. It therefore adds a different and important dimension in analysing subjectivities.

As outlined above there are significant implications emerging from a consideration of spiritual issues within critical postmodern social work theory, which should not be

overlooked especially given that the focus of this approach is on oppression and goals of emancipation.

Limitations of this research

In the process of forming my work I have been very aware of the inherent inadequacy in attempting to describe, explore and depict the depth of spiritual issues. Spirituality is a unique and complex topic. As I have said before it can involve private and sacred aspects, it is difficult to discuss within language, and various social and power relations shape it. So, there are bound to be limitations in any discussion of spirituality, especially in written work with a theoretical focus. I have avoided constructing specialised spiritual knowledge, but in connecting spiritual knowing to theory there is a tendency to theorise spirituality. This is problematic because theories and concepts are primarily the domain of the rational and conceptual mind, whereas spiritual knowing tends to move away from the mind. This is not to say there is a divide between people's spirituality and their intelligence-mind. As Ferrer (2002) proposes, spiritual ways of knowing can refer to or encompass "*a multidimensional access to reality that includes... the intellectual knowing of the mind*" (p.121). However, just because spirituality can include the mind does not mean that theory is compatible with spirituality. Theory does still have the potential to limit and restrict spiritual knowing.

If the nature of theory itself can restrict spirituality, the complexity and inaccessibility of particular theories can add to this. Both liberation spirituality and critical postmodern social work are complex theories tailored to specific fields and as such they tend to use specialised knowledge. This can make them inaccessible or difficult for people to grasp. In conducting this research I have attempted to make my writing as accessible as possible, so as to avoid a labyrinth of knowledge; however, I am not sure how successful I have been in this. I believe both the complexity of issues relating to spirituality, and my use of the language drawing from liberation spirituality and critical postmodern social work has made my writing fairly dense.

On a more positive note, in beginning my framework I was hesitant about my ability to relate liberation spirituality and critical postmodern social work to each other. Many theories tend to occupy a self-contained world, with their own history, focus and language, and therefore I feared that a dialogue between these two might be difficult. However, I believe I have managed to conduct this dialogue. And while using only parts of liberation spirituality, I create a dialogue without losing the essentials within Kovel's idea of liberation spirituality.

This dialogue has however been restricted by the absence of a practical component. I conducted this thesis in a theoretical fashion, but I am aware that it would be enhanced by a practical component of research. Research that is directly based in practice is needed, so we do not just look at the practical implications of theory but also the theoretical implications of practice. However, it was outside the scope of this research to include a practical component.

Spirituality, as mentioned previously, is a somewhat illusive and intangible concept. My intention has been to work with a definition of spirituality that considers the social influences involved in shaping people's spirituality such as the historical and social context. Kovel's definition of spirituality has allowed me to conduct a workable analysis of spirituality. However, this definition was used with the realisation that defining spirituality in a certain way means that some people's understandings are likely to be excluded, which might limit the application of my work. It was also used with an awareness that no definition or discussion, including my own, can capture the diversity, depth or breadth of spirituality.

I have been identifying above boundaries and limitations of my work. In this research they have not been seen as something to be resolved, but rather to be acknowledged. This acknowledgement of limitations is essential as it allows for people's work to be used cautiously and it identifies areas where development and improvement is needed. It also leads to a consideration of what direction future research might take.

Future questions & directions

I have identified in earlier chapters that there are many underdeveloped areas in the field of social work and spirituality, such as: client's perspectives, women and spirituality, postmodernism and spirituality, more 'macro' focused social work (such as community development) and spirituality, ethical considerations and theoretical or conceptual frameworks. I have begun to address the theoretical and conceptual underdevelopment of spirituality and emancipatory politics, and touched on issues of postmodernism and spirituality. I have been able to contribute to these areas, but further research and development is still needed. A practical exploration into the relationship between emancipation and spirituality could be a possible area for further research. An example of this might be researching how an indigenous community may use their spirituality to resist social alienation and oppression. Research is also needed specifically in relation to clients and spirituality, as their perspectives on spiritual issues are currently overlooked in the literature. The majority of studies focus on social workers dealing with spiritual matters (Rice, 2002). This needs to change with an increase in research focused on clients and their opinions on and engagement with spiritual issues.

Furthermore, while my research suggests that there are strong links between social justice and spirituality, this is not to counter the fact that there are strong links between social injustice and some spiritual perspectives. The ethics behind this latter link is another possible direction for future research. While all these particular areas are important for future research, what is needed most is simply more research into spirituality and social work theory and practice, to open up a space for the discussion and consideration of spirituality. More research is needed to acknowledge spiritual issues and to bring spirituality out of the marginalised position it currently occupies in social work.

A final thought

Critical postmodern social work theorists have in many ways challenged critical social work in the modernist tradition, particularly, to be more holistic and to look beyond rationalistic understandings of oppression and emancipation. Throughout this thesis I

have suggested that critical postmodern approaches to social work do not meet this challenge itself, but they have the capacity to do so. Critical postmodern social work is a perspective that is capable of reflecting on its faults and acknowledging that is a work in progress, and as such it is open to development and change. I have put forth my work as a starting point, a conceptual guide, to contribute to the further change and development of critical postmodern social work. My work offers a challenge to theorists and practitioners of critical postmodern social work to be more holistic, to consider spiritual ways of knowing and to see emancipation and oppression in a whole new light. It is a challenge that I very much hope is accepted⁸.

⁸ At the conclusion of my thesis I found a special issue on spirituality in a critical social work journal. It contained a number of articles that began to tease out what spirituality has to offer critical social work (Graham & Coates, 2005). I believe the presence and content of these articles indicates that spirituality is beginning to be considered by critical social work practitioners and theorists. I hope this is a positive sign of interest and research to come.

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